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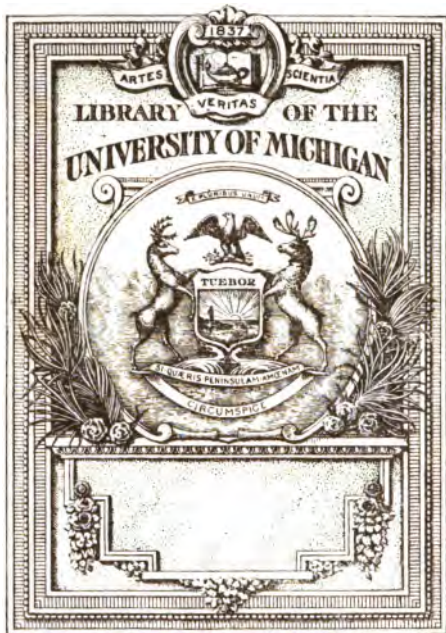
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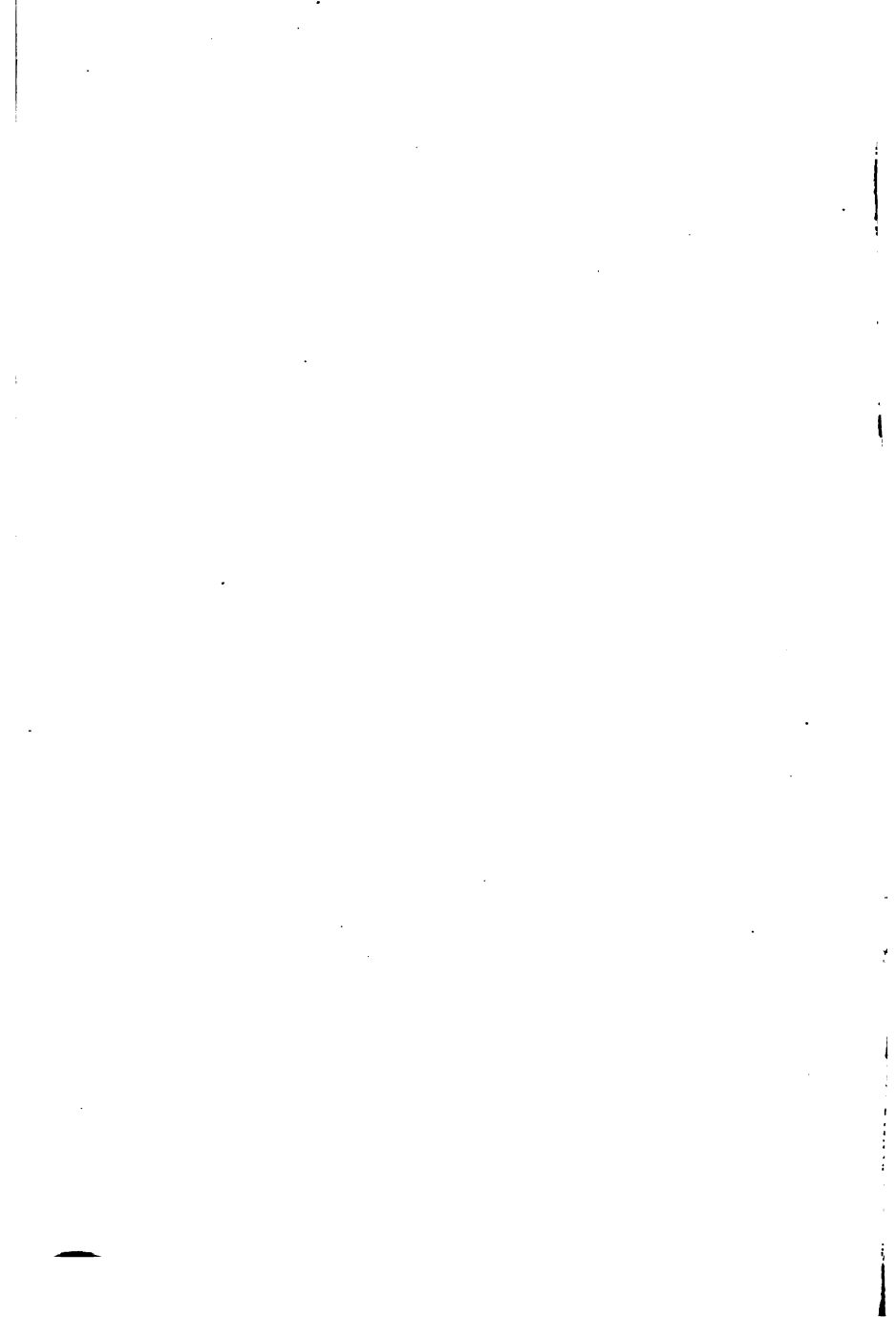


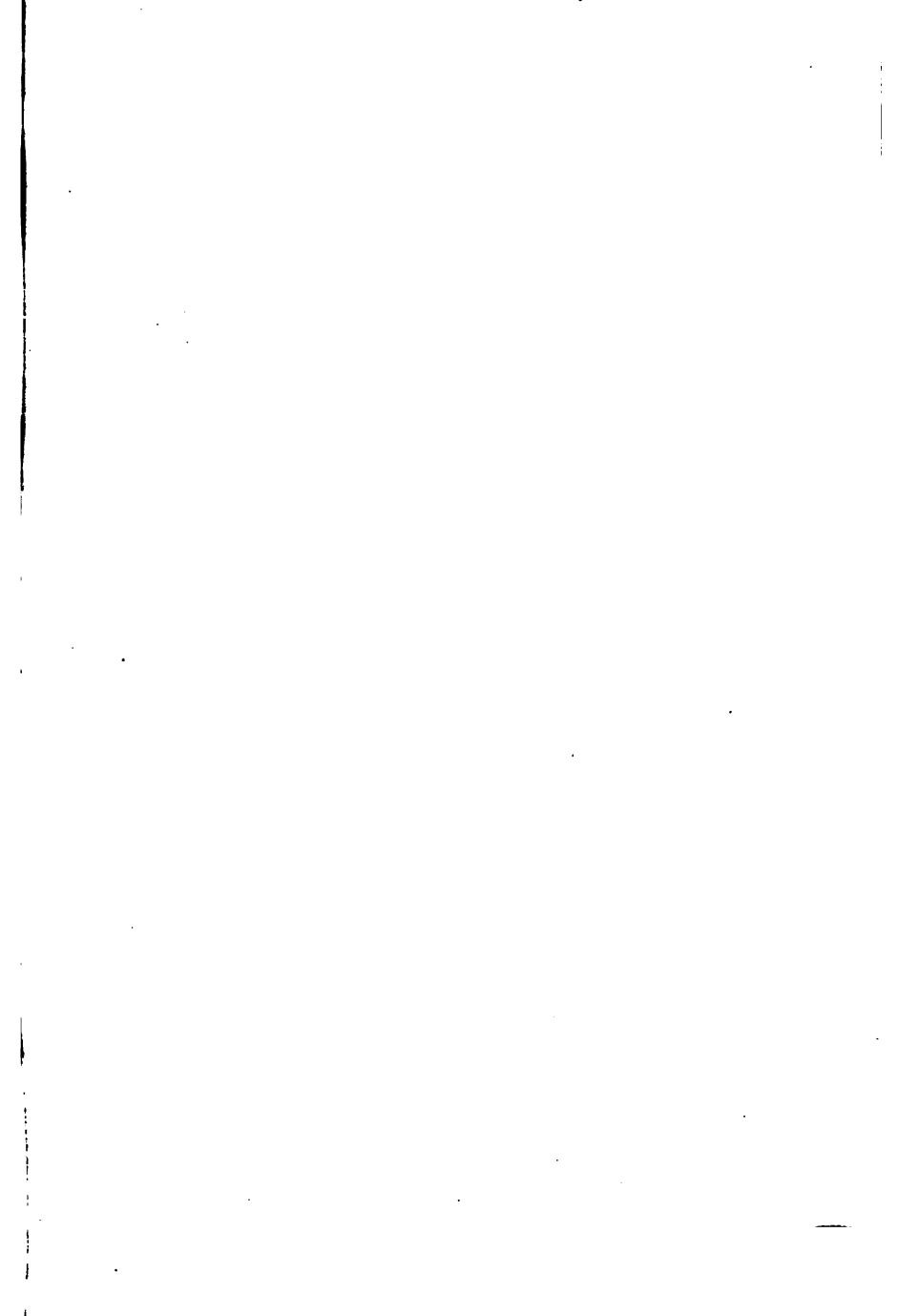
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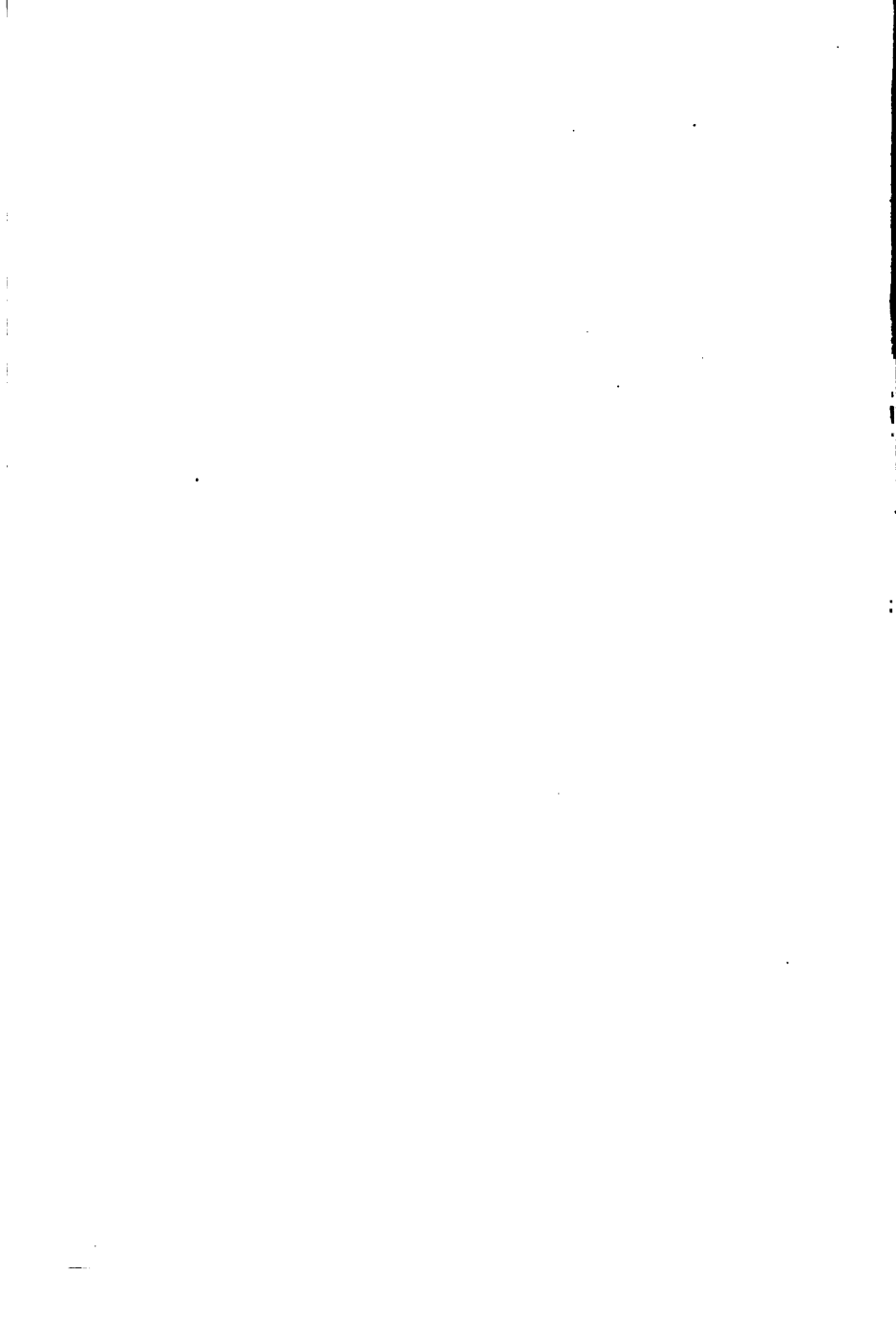
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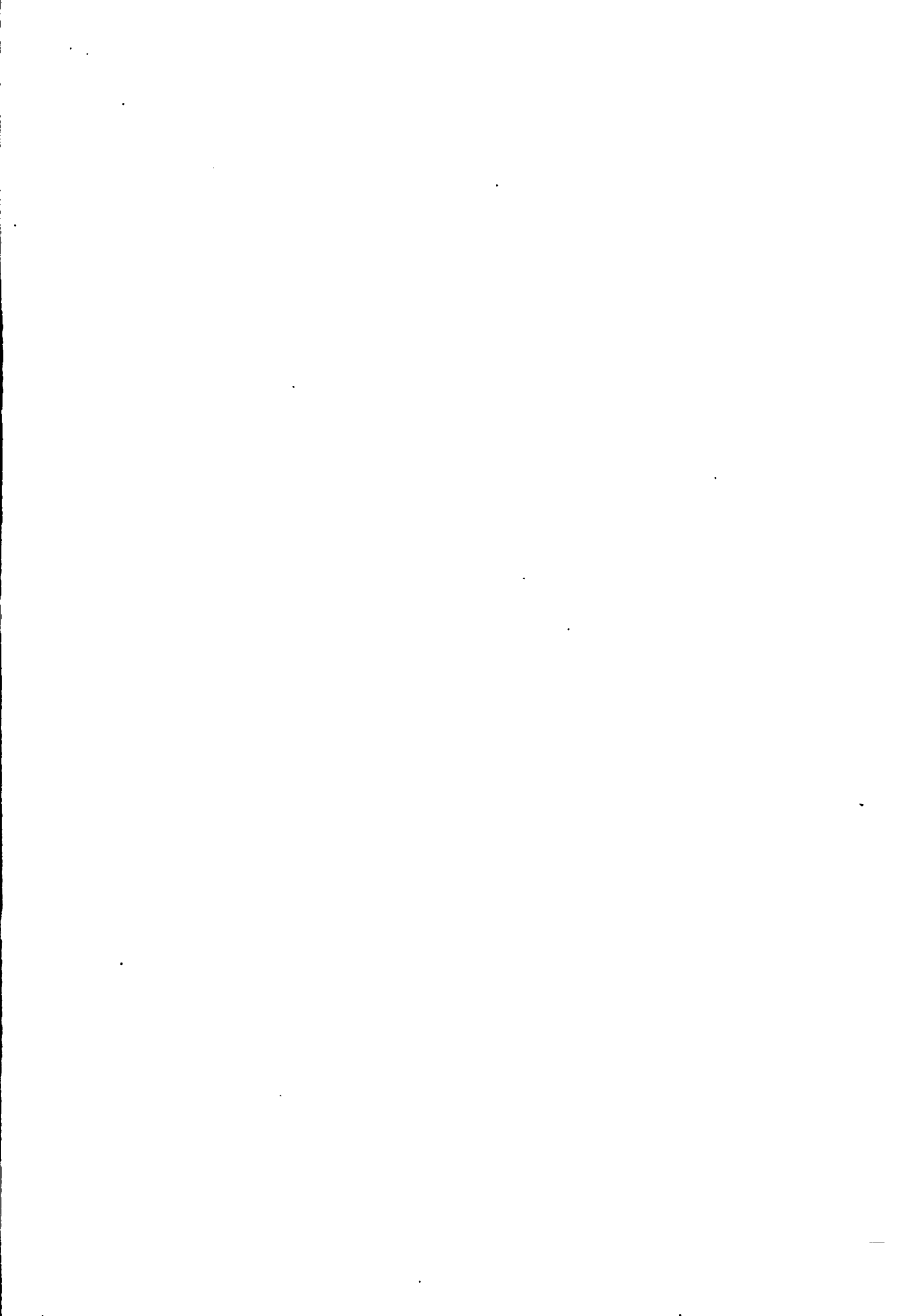
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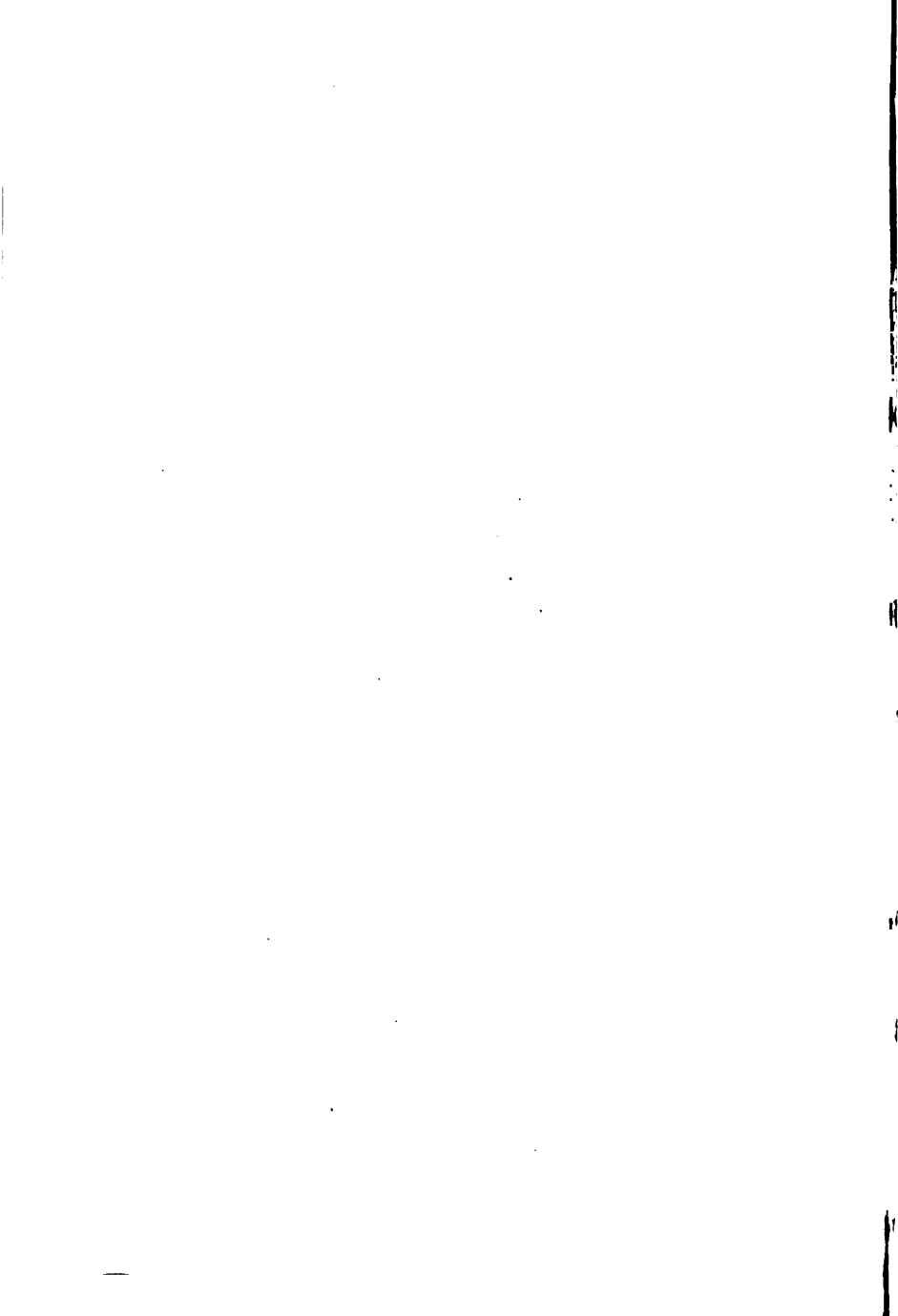
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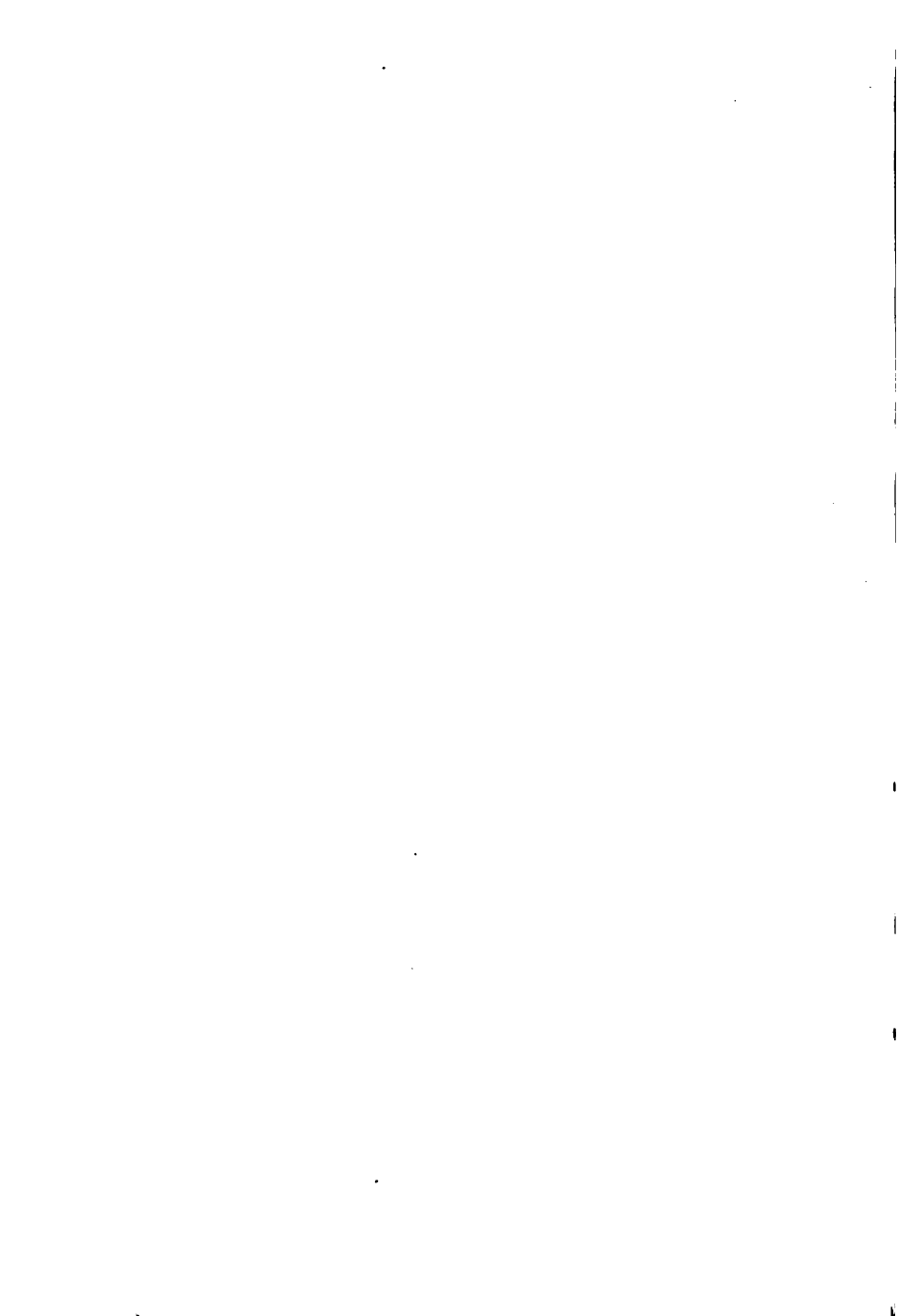






**MICHAEL CASSIDY.
SERGEANT**

‘ ‘ S A P P E R ‘ ‘



MICHAEL CASSIDY, SERGEANT


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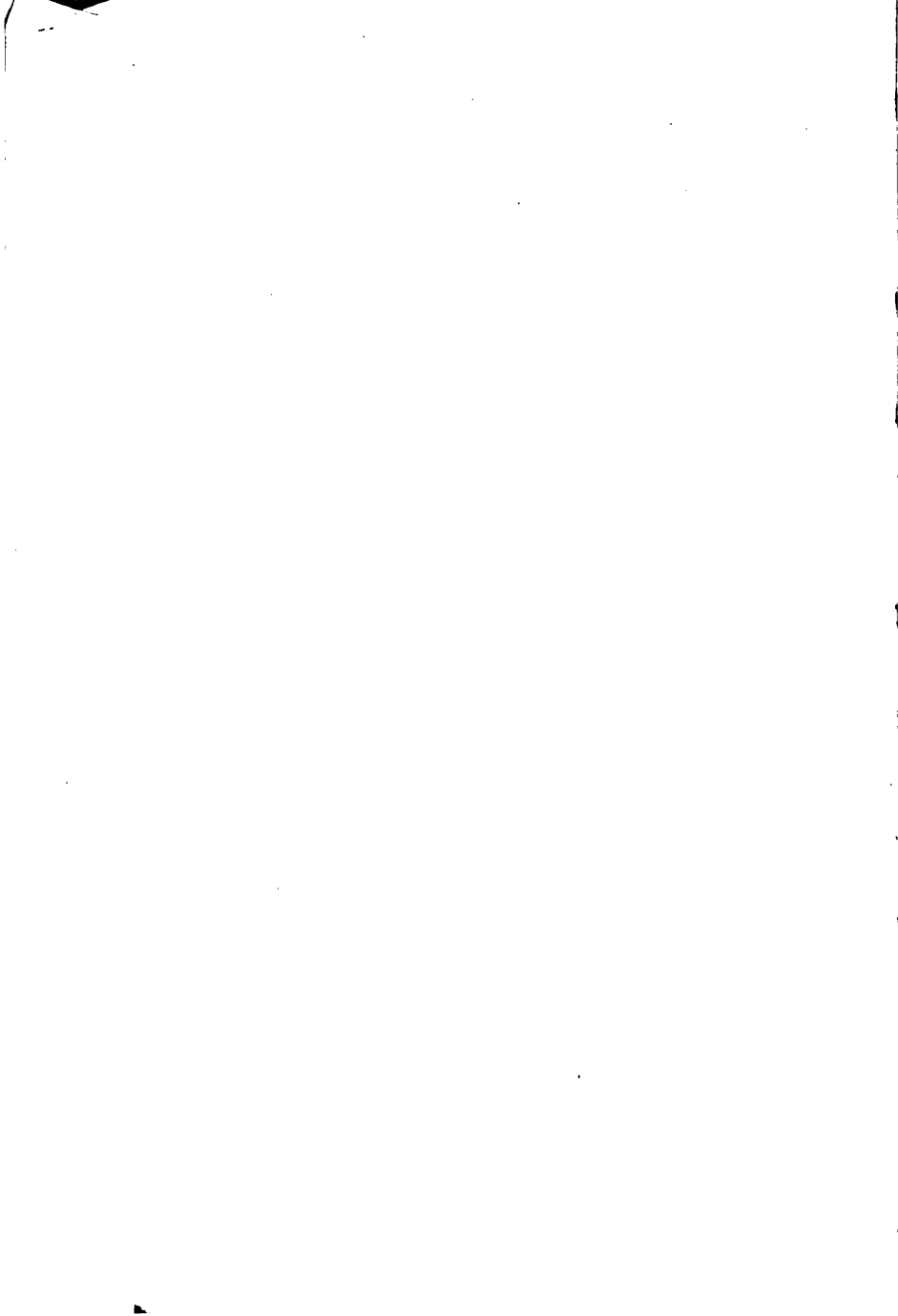
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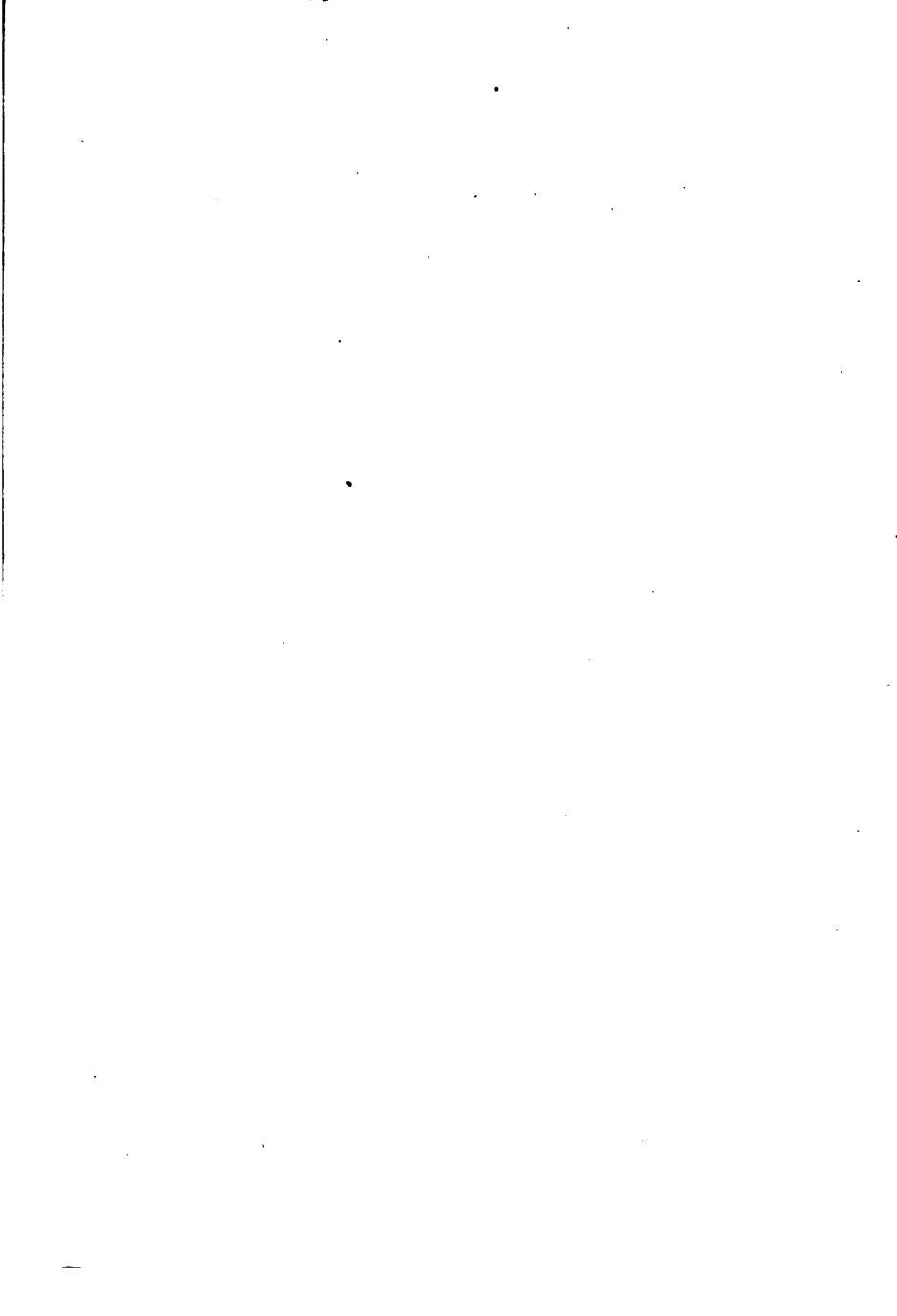
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MICHAEL CASSIDY, SERGEANT



MICHAEL CASSIDY, SERGEANT

CHAPTER I

THE GUARDS

SURE, and it's the neatest little girl I've seen this side of Connymara that you are. It's a souvenir that you're wanting? By jabers! it's a souvenir you'll have, anyway. 'Tis the correct thing the other side of the water, whichever way you go."

The resounding noise of a kiss assailed my scandalised ears, followed by rapidly retreating feminine footsteps.

"I'll be after waiting for you here to-morrow morning at the same time." Sergeant Michael Cassidy's rich Irish voice followed the invisible recipient of his souvenir as she departed; and judging by the way he leaned over the railings waving an extremely dirty pocket-handkerchief, I came to the reluctant conclusion that the lady was not only not averse to receiving souvenirs, but would in all probability return for more.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself, Michael Cassidy—you with a wife and four children in Ballygoyle?"

I remarked, as the handkerchief gradually became less violent.

"And what the devil—— Ah! by all the saints! 'tis you, sir." Limping and leaning heavily on a crutch, Sergeant Cassidy came towards me. "'Tis great to see you again, sir. Is it wounded you've been, or why are you not over yonder?" He waved his free arm vaguely in the direction of Wales: however his meaning was clear.

"I was abroad when it started, Cassidy, and they've caught me for Kitchener's Army." I held my cigarette case out to him.

"'Tis bad luck that," he remarked, as he lit one of my best gold-tipped cigarettes. "But bedad you'll be after getting all you want when you do get out. It's no picnic at all—what with the Black Marias, and coal boxes, and snipers."

"What's the matter with you?" I asked as we sat down.

"I stopped a bit of lead with my foot. Nothing at all: we were just putting up a bit of wire one night in a wood, and one of them snipers got an outer in my foot."

He regarded the offending member with a critical eye.

Michael Cassidy is sergeant in His Majesty's Corps of Royal Engineers, to which I also have the honour to belong in the humble capacity of officer. I say humble advisedly; for there are sergeants of many

sorts and kinds, and there is Michael Cassidy, and in his presence even Director Generals have trembled.

"And how's the Old Guard getting along, Cassidy?" I asked.

"Fine, sir, fine. It's a lot of officers we've lost, though—killed and wounded!" He gave a little sigh.

"And what is up this morning?" I inquired of a nurse who had bustled up. "You seem very busy."

"He wishes to go for a drive," she said.

I asked the unnecessary question. There being some twenty other wounded in the house, to a casual observer the question as to who wished to go for a drive might not appear unnecessary; but then the casual observer does not know Cassidy.

Receiving, as I had anticipated, an amazed "Why, Sergeant Cassidy, of course," I turned again to that gentleman.

"I rather think I'll come with you—unless," I added, "any beautiful lady wishes the privilege."

"No," he answered, "no, I was going alone, and it's delighted I shall be if you'll come."

So it happened that in a few minutes we were rolling smoothly towards Regent's Park. It was at the entrance by Sussex Place, as far as I can remember, that he suddenly blew a delighted kiss to a lady standing on the pavement, whom I recognised, to my horror, as the wife of a well-known sporting peer.

"Cassidy," I said, "for Heaven's sake, what are you doing?" I clutched his arm. "Do you know who that was?"

"I do not," he said. "But she was a decent enough looking little filly, and would I not be blowing her a kiss?" He dismissed this untoward incident with a wave of the hand, and sat back majestically in the car. The next instant he sat up with a jerk. "Glory be, sir," he said, "and what is that that I see?"

I followed the direction of his eyes, and saw, that at present familiar sight to all Londoners, a line of men in wonderful garments, bowlers, flannel trousers, scarlet tunics, brown brogue shoes, and the like, advancing a few paces, then lying down, and finally charging the road with hoarse and horrible noises.

"It is Kitchener's Army training," I said.

"The saints be praised," he remarked. "Seeing them without any uniform, I thought that likely enough some scheming blackguard had hopped it with their money, and that sort of row is one I am not willing to miss." He watched them closely as, the charge over, they closed up on the road to listen to the words of wisdom of their platoon commander. "Indeed," he went on after a moment, "'tis Kitchener's Army they are! And a likely-looking lot of boys, or my name is not Michael Cassidy. But tell me, sir," he turned to me, "are they allowed to dig in the grass here?"

I told him that I really wasn't certain whether they were actually allowed to dig in the Park itself, but that they anyway did it elsewhere.

"That is good," he said. "You must mind, sir, that the war over yonder is different to what you and I

were brought up to. What we have just seen is good: 'tis undoubtedly good that the foot soldiers should be able to run and lie down the like we have been after looking at; but it is by no manner of speaking all. And it is the other great part of their training that I would not see left out, for, begorra, 'tis the most important."

"You mean the digging, Cassidy?" I asked.

"I mean that same, sir. I would march those lads miles and miles till they were fit to drop, and when they were so tired that they were unable to wish for anything—not even beer—I would say to them, 'Dig, you blackguards, dig yourselves in, and I will give you an hour to do that same in. And if I find any man who has made but a scratch in the ground, I will be upon him and he will be sorry that he was ever born. You are to go down four feet or four feet six, and you shall not rest till you have it done.' Then, when I had seen them do it, I would say to them, 'That is what you will do over yonder, only then it will not be in the daylight; 'twill be at night, and we will practise that same every day for the next month. It is that," he continued, "that made those fellows the devils," and with a large hand he indicated the Zoo.

"Which fellows?" I asked, a little bewildered.

"Those Guards," he answered. "It is there that they live, is it not? though it seems a strange place for those smart gentlemen."

"They have moved into the Cavalry Barracks

lately," I answered mildly, "but they are not far from here."

"I knew they were somewhere in these parks," he remarked. "And you say they are cavalry?"

"The particular barracks in Regent's Park are cavalry ones," I told him.

"Is that so?" he said, as he lit another of my cigarettes. "Well, of those Cavalry Guards I cannot speak. They have not, up to date, served with me personally." He paused in thought.

"Oh! you haven't been with them out there?" I asked, as his attention wandered to a nursemaid on the path.

"That is correct, sir," he returned, when the perambulator had vanished. "They have not been with me out there; but I have heard tell that they are equally devils. But it is of those Foot Guards that I would tell you, for I have not seen their equals in a fight outside of Ballygoyle. I mind me once, when I was in these parts before, I was standing in one of those crowded streets, when I heard the sound of a band, and coming along the road was a company of those fellows. 'Twas a dream to watch them, they were so smart; and I was just thinking that I myself could not have walked better than the man with the stick at the head, when a little rat of a man standing beside me, said to me all of a sudden, he says, 'And what is the use of those fellows? Dressed-up dolls, I call them, and that's what I and the likes of me have to

pay for. Soldiers like you,' he says to me, 'we do not mind, but those——' and he spat in the gutter.

"'Ye dirty little beast,' I says to him, 'is it a drink you're wanting with your flattery? With a face like yours, whatever clothes you were after putting on, it is not a doll you would resemble, but a walking pimple; and as for paying, you have never paid for anything yet in your life unless you could not steal it,' and with that I put him in the gutter too.

"But it is an undoubted fact, sir," he continued, "that those fellows were not with a certain class of the people too popular. They are always about with His Majesty the King—the saints preserve him—and, as I say, a certain class of the people think that they cannot fight, because they are too grand to do that same. Well—they are wrong," and with an air of finality Cassidy smiled at three complete strangers of the female sex.

"You mind, sir," he continued after a moment, "that, as I told you, the war is different to what you and I were brought up to expect. Take our own work, for instance. Since we have been up in the North, 'tis entirely at night that we have been used. The foot soldiers are in the trenches, and the Germans are in their trenches, so close that they are able to wish one another the top of the morning. But as those Germans, when they were making an endeavour to break through our lines, were not in the habit of ringing a bell before they started, it was necessary to put up a halting-place where they might gain breath,

the better to attack. That they should stop there, because they could not get through the wire, was not our fault, and if they were killed, well, what could they expect with the range but ten or fifteen yards? I mind me one morning I was in the trenches, and when the dawn broke 'twas an ugly sight. There must have been a hundred of them dead on the wire we had put up the night before. One of them was facing me, so close that I could almost touch him.

"He had the wire-cutters in his right hand, and it was stretched above his head. He was lying on the apron of the wire, and his head was twisted, and he was grinning. His legs was all twisted, and he still held his rifle in his left hand. And he went on grinning, until I was after shouting at him to turn his face away. And one of those Foot Guards sergeants he says to me, he says, 'Tis not a pleasant sight,' he says. 'It's alive he might be, and the bully beef is uncommon hard on the stomach for the contemplation of him.' 'I have a wife,' I said to him, 'a wife and four kiddies in Ballygoyle, and it's thinking I am that that man there may have the same. What would she say if she were to see that grin? Ah! for the Holy Mother's sake, turn your face away,' I muttered, for my nerves were a bit upset, and I could not take my eyes from that grin. And then he slips down—quietly like, all of a sudden, and as he slipped his chin caught in one of the wires, and his head went back, and he stopped his grinning.

"But 'twas the Guards I was after speaking to you

of." Cassidy became cheerful again. "It will be clear to you, sir," he said, "that when one is putting up that same wire in front of those trenches, it makes a power of difference who it is that is behind. For some of those lads—especially those recruits who had come out to replace the casualties—were a bit jumpy: and in the habit of loosing off into the night without due consideration of the consequences. It is just as easy to be killed from behind, when one is on the top of the ground working between the trenches, as it is to be killed from in front. I remember me one night when that flat-footed malingerer O'Toole of whom I have already spoken to you, missed the picket with his maul, and hit the foot of Angus MacNab. 'Twas a fearful howl that rent the night, and the Germans thought that it was attacking we were. So they started to fire. 'Lie down,' I screams as our own fellows fired too, 'or it's shot we shall be.' And there we lie for half an hour, while they shot over our heads. 'Twas a mercy no one was hit; though 'twas the language of MacNab that had us saved. He had thrown himself down when I shouted, and his face met some bully beef which had walked out of the trenches on its own. That and his foot combined raised the tone of his conversation, and deflected those bullets.

"But as you know, sir," he went on, "when we are working we have not the time to fire even if we are attacked. It is therefore desirable to get, if the infantry will arrange it, a covering party, which will give the warning if the Germans are coming. But the

infantry were having a terrible time.. They were being shelled all day and half the night, and 'twas sometimes a little difficult to get that same covering party. For it meant, as you will see, going even nearer to the Germans than we were, and in addition to that it meant coming out of the trenches where they felt they were, in a manner of speaking, safe. It was necessary to use a little persuasion at times, and sometimes even we worked without them at all.

“But one night, I mind me, we were to work in front of the Guards. When we arrived, at about ten of the clock, Mr. Trentham was with us in command, and he crept along the trench with me to find the officer. ‘Is it wiring you are?’ he says, when we found him. ‘We’ll have a drop of the old and bold, while I arrange for the party to cover you as you work.’ And with that he went out, and we each had a drop of the stuff, which same, I remember me, was the proper goods. Then he came back and said, ‘’Tis all arranged, and I have the men told that you are doing the dirty in front, and they will not fire until I tell them.’ Mr. Trentham and I, we looked at one another, and ’twas the same thought in both our minds: ‘If ’twas always like that how easy it would be!’ The covering party ready at once, and offered without the asking: the splendid discipline of it all! For those men behind us would have died sooner than fire without the further orders. Mind you, sir, there are many other regiments the same, but ’tis unfair to my manner of thinking that any one should say those Guards

are for show alone. And I says, and I'd like to meet the man that would deny me, that the discipline in those fellows is simply amazing."

"But where does the digging come in, Cassidy?" I asked.

"'Tis another story, that, sir," he answered, "but 'tis all part of the same thing—the discipline. You'll mind, that when men have been fighting hard, or when they have been marching, and it is all over for the time, the first thought of those men is to lie down and go to sleep. They are done to the world, they are dead beat, and more often than not it is at night. I am speaking of the thing as it was some month or two ago. The men are there—the position is new—and they cannot see ten yards in front of them. There is no officer at hand, maybe, and they just lie down and go to sleep. Now, sir, that will not do at all. 'Tis fatal. The morning comes, and those coal boxes start again, and the men are in the open. Even if they are not hit, they get a bit jumpy in a manner of speaking, for those contraptions are ugly things to watch, bursting all round you. They get jumpy, I say, and perhaps one comes a bit nearer than the rest, and somebody mutters 'Let's hop it.' 'Tis not a thing which we would wish to speak of, sir, but you know as well as I that those things happen even in the finest army of the world. Had those same lads been made to dig themselves in—right in, not a blithering little hole scratched in the mud, but down four foot or more, when they got there the night previous, some of those

things which I have seen, and of which same I would rather not speak, would not have happened at all. But 'tis discipline that is needed to make a man dig when he is beat to the world, and there is no regiment in the Army that has the Guards beat at it. Some are as good, but there is none that has them beat. Those fellows have not yet run, that I knows of: they have not budged one inch from the places where they were put, and there are regiments that cannot say that same. And I puts it down to the making the men dig themselves in, to a great extent—to the discipline that makes the man not skimp his work because the officer is not behind him with a stick. You will understand, sir, when I say run I do not mean that any one has hopped it bad: at least, glory be, I have not seen that same. But 'tis just that hopping it for a quarter of a mile or so and losing the advantage that you had won overnight, for the want of the digging, that sometimes occurred, before the importance of that same digging was understood properly; and it's there those Guards were so good, and it's that which those fellows who are now training should have shooed into their heads."

"I think that lesson has been well learned," I said as he stopped.

"Sir," he answered seriously, "it cannot be learned too well, for 'tis a matter of life and death."

CHAPTER II

A SUBALTERN OF THE GUARDS

SLOWLY the car glided past Wellington Barracks, and as we passed one of the entrances three young officers came out.

“Good lads they are,” cried Cassidy, “with that swagger which is right and fitting. For as you know, sir, if there is one thing which the boys cannot abide, it is the officer who creeps about like a cheese mite. They have their faults, those lads, but they are faults on the right side. I mind me now of a story I heard out yonder. They’d suffered, those Guard regiments, lost something cruel, as you know; and the young gentlemen from home were coming out to replace the casualties. Well, as you can imagine, sir, ’tis an uneasy matter at times for a young lad, fresh to the game, to find himself with old soldiers who have him watched, to see what manner of lad he is when the Marias are about. And ’tis the fear of being afraid that makes their hands tremble a bit, and gives them a touch of sweat on the forehead though the day would kill a polar bear with the cold. ’Tis the fear of being afraid of which those lads are afraid. One of those young lads—a proper thoroughbred he was—

came out, and found himself in a trench, with the lads with their eyes on him.

“ ‘Tis afraid they think me,’ he says to himself. ‘I’ll show ’em, the blighters.’ So he stepped out of the trench, as pleasant as may be, as if to take the air. ‘Come in, sir,’ begs the sergeant—‘ ’tis death outside.’ ‘Seems quite a healthy sort of death, sergeant,’ says he, as nice as you like, and as he was speaking he took it. Luckily for him ’twas only a flesh wound, in such a place that he could not sit down with ease. The men they roared with laughter, and the sergeant smiled; and at that moment along creeps the captain. ‘ ’Tis wounded I am, sir,’ says the subaltern. ‘Bad luck,’ says the captain; ‘and where have you taken it?’ ‘Where it will hinder the easy use of the firing step to sit on,’ says the subaltern. ‘And how the devil did you take it there?’ says the captain. ‘Was it out of the trench you were?’ ‘I was that,’ he says—‘taking the air.’ The captain looked at the sergeant and saw him smile, and the captain looked at the men and saw them with their hands to their mouths studying the view. ‘You cannot with ease sit upon the step,’ he said. ‘Can you with ease accompany me a little distance down the trench? And you will come as well, sergeant,’ he says, ‘for I’m minded to discuss this question of taking the air.’ When they were away from the men he said to the sergeant, ‘Did you tell the officer the air was unhealthy a few feet higher up?’ ‘I did that, sir,’ said the sergeant. ‘All right,’ he said, ‘that will do.’ The sergeant backed away a few paces,

and then the captain started. 'Mr. So-and-so,' he started—I misremember the gentleman's name—'have you made any mistake? You aren't by any means under the delusion that you are out here to practise open-air pastoral dances, are you? You aren't qualifying for an instructor in Swedish exercises by any chance, are you?' 'No, sir,' said the little officer, looking all bewildered like. 'Then what the blazes do you mean by behaving like an organ grinder's monkey and getting out of that trench?' he roared. 'Twas to show them I was not afraid,' says the little 'un, standing bolt upright and looking him straight in the face. The captain's eyes they twinkled, and he looked away that the lad might not see; then he turned back. 'The officers in our regiment,' he said, 'are never afraid. Let us not be mistaken,' he said. 'When you come to me as my subaltern, I want you alive and well. It is your job to keep yourself fit, and not get wounded. If I told you to lead the men over that ground there,' and he pointed to the German trenches, 'and you refused or hesitated, though 'twould be certain death you went to, I would blow your brains out if you could not blow them out yourself. But I did not tell you to give an imitation of a skirt dance at the Alhambra merely to show that you possessed what you should blow your brains out for if you didn't. It's taught you a lesson, my lad, and a damned good one. Take him away,' he said to the sergeant, 'and have it dressed. If he can't sit down, he must lie on his face.' The lad was nigh faint with the blood he had lost, but he

stood up and he said, 'I'm sorry, sir: I was a fool.' 'You were, my lad,' said the captain; but as he went back to the trench past the sergeant, he said to him, 'They're the sort of fool we can do with, though, aren't they?'

"A thoroughbred lot they are," continued Cassidy, after a pause, "with their eyeglasses, and hair-oil, and the like. Hampers they have from the big shops, they tell me, with bottles of the stuff inside. And the talking of those same bottles reminds me of another story about those same Guards." He paused reminiscently as a huge and majestic policeman barred our way.

"The lad in blue," he went on after a moment, "he over yonder hiding the 'bus, is about the same size, from all I've heard, as one of the German officers that fell into the trenches the other night. They were our Guards in them, and if I am not mistaken the fat one was of the Prussian Guard. 'Twas in the days two months ago, when they were trying to break the line. They got right up to our trenches, the devils, and jumped in, and there was a grand box-up. The fat lad stood on the side before getting in, and the earth gave way, so he got in unexpected like, and fell upon one of the young officer gentlemen. Well, as was natural, there was a great box-up, and the fighting between the men was of a quality not often struck outside of Ireland. It went on for some minutes, but at last the Boches were all killed or prisoners, when they became aware of a terrible noise at the end of the trench. They looked, and the sergeant he said,

'Mother of Heaven! is it an elephant or a whale that we have?' for there was water in the trench, and as far as could be seen there was a huge fat thing wallowing in it, blowing like a porpoise. They could not see rightly what was happening, so they let him blow for a bit. Laughing they were, when he suddenly says, 'Shall we stop?' in English. 'It's bored I'm getting, old dear,' said a voice from the region of his stomach. 'Glory be,' said the sergeant, 'the officer is underneath. Pull him off, boys.' When they had pulled him off, they dug the officer out of the mud. 'It's a prisoner I would be,' said the German. 'I am not liking the life.' 'It's a prisoner you are,' cried the officer, when he had taken the mud from his mouth; 'but it does not alter the fact that you have the last bottle of my Madeira smashed, and it's amputated my foot must be where you sat upon it.—Take him back out of the trench,' he said to the sergeant, 'with the other prisoners. His general appearance is beastly, and he has the rum spilt as well.'

"'I'm doubting whether he will get down the communication trench, sir,'" said the sergeant, 'for it's a large man he is, and the trenches are not yet widened.'

"'Then roll the blighter along the top,' said he; 'but take him away, for I dislike him greatly.'"

By devious routes we had now reached the Houses of Parliament, and were turning for home. My thoughts as to whether by any chance the arbiter of my fate and finances should be leaning gracefully from

the window of my bank, and imagining that some one had given me a Rolls Royce, again become gracious as in the days of long ago, when once for over a week I was in credit, were interrupted by Cassidy's exclamation. The Guard was changing at the Horse Guards, and the usual crowd was watching. "'Tis great lads they are," he said—"great. They can march and they can fight. They can sit still in a trench, and they can charge, and there are few that are their equals."

And then I left him, to squeeze another fiver out of that granite boulder—my bank account.

CHAPTER III

THE BRIDGE

I HAVE been wondering, sir," remarked Cassidy to me the next day, "whether we were not perhaps a little hard on those five boys yesterday, that we saw in the train."

I had strolled round in the afternoon to hear from him the story of Dennis O'Rourke, and what had happened at the Bridge.

"It is not maybe that they are afraid, sir," he went on, "for I'm thinking that if they were, they would be far more frightened of saying so, but it is that they do not realise; and 'tis hard to see how they can, for it has not been brought home to them—none of those little things that one sees, which serve to make one understand what it means.

"I remember one day—'twas in the early stages when we were drawing them after us into France. 'Twas hot—hot as the devil—and towards the evening I was riding quiet like, along a nice shady road, for all the world as it might have been a lane in England. For the time there was but little noise of firing at all—'twas just a bit of a lull—but we had seen them, and we knew they were coming, coming in motor-

'buses, and the saints know what else; in thousands and thousands they were pouring along after us, though at the time we did not know 'twas as bad as it was. Oh! 'twas cruel; but as I say, I was away on my own—the sappers mostly were those days, being split up for the different jobs—and as I rode along the road I saw a lad leaning over the hedge sucking a straw. Away back behind him was a great house and stables, and I said to him, I said,

“‘Bong soir,’ I said.

“‘Cheese it,’ he answers. ‘Who are you bong-soiring?’

“When I heard him talking plain like that, I pulled up and looked at him. ‘I thought you were a Frenchie,’ I said to him, ‘till you opened your beer trap. Do you grow here, or are you touring the country for fun?’

“‘I ride for the stable up yonder,’ he said, pointing with his thumb.

“‘Bedad!’ I said, ‘’tis a training stable you have,’ for it had not struck me they had those things in France at all.

“‘Did you think it was a potted meat factory?’ he said.

“‘I did not,’ I said; ‘but unless you hop it pretty quickly it precious soon will be.’

“‘What are you meaning?’ said the trainer, who had come out and overheard what I said.

“‘Unless you and your horses and your lads hop it smartly,’ I said to him, ‘it’s hopping in another

direction you'll be before the morning, for by that time the Germans will be upon you.'

"'Are you sure?' he said, 'for I have some valuable horses with me, and I would not lose them.'

"'Am I sure?' said I. 'Would I be riding for three days without ceasing, with a thirst like the morning after, if I were not sure?'

"'What will I do?' he said, 'for 'tis the first I have heard of it.'

"'Do!' I said. 'The first thing you will do is to give me a drink, and my horse as well, and then you will gather your lads and you will ride south, and you will not stop riding for a week or so; for if you do not, 'tis little riding you'll any of you do again.'

"When he saw I was in earnest 'twas a terrible blather he got into, and the last I saw of him he was riding into the dusk with his boys behind him and his stud of twelve horses, while the old woman who cleaned his house was hopping along beside him in the road, hanging on to his stirrup leather—and she a martyr to the indigestion as one of the lads told me. I know not what happened to him, but the next morning I saw his house fired, and 'twas a mercy I had the whisky removed. 'Tis the little things like that that make the people realise what war is; and we have not had the like in England at all, and it perhaps would be a good thing if we had, I'm after thinking."

He paused to light another of my cigarettes.

"But it was of Mr. O'Rourke I would tell you, sir,"

he went on. "'Twas the morning after the little affair of which I have just told you, that we received the orders to go at once to a bridge near by and have it prepared for the demolition. Mr. O'Rourke was in charge, and I was with him, and we had about a dozen of the lads. When we got there we found 'twas a big one over a river—a sort of suspension bridge, and 'twas evidently an important one. 'Twas another scorching day, and Mr. O'Rourke he says, 'Let's get it fixed up quick, boys,' he says, 'and it's a bathe we can have.' Well, there is not the necessity for me to tell you the details of the fixing—of how we placed the gun-cotton on the cables, and the leads were running to the exploder hidden behind a tree on our own side. We tested it all, and we had the bit of fuse and another detonator fixed up in case of any failure in the electricity. When we had it done, some of the lads had a bathe, and we lay in the shade of a few trees, most of us fast asleep—for you will mind that our orders were only to prepare it for the demolition, and not actually to blow it up. 'Twas still—'twas just peace: the heat haze shimmering in the blue, and the buzz of the little flies and things, to send one to sleep, for we were well behind our own men. Two hours later—well, we will come to that, sir, but it will give you an idea of how those fellows came on. It seemed as if we had been there but a minute, but maybe it was half an hour, when with a crash one of the Horse Batteries galloped over the bridge. The dust rose in great choking clouds, and through it we

could see the drivers—their collars open, their faces grey with it, some with hats and some without, themselves sitting down and riding like men possessed, while their horses sweated and galloped and the guns swayed behind. In a second they were gone, and only the dust remained.

“Mr. O’Rourke he turned to me and he said, ‘They were going fast even for the Horse,’ he said, ‘along a road; and I would to Heaven it had been the other way they were galloping,’ for I should tell you, sir, they were going south. Five minutes later we heard them come into action a quarter of a mile behind us. ‘Covering the retreat again,’ he muttered; and barely had he spoken when an Infantry regiment came in sight—going the same way. Mr. O’Rourke and I we went into the centre of the bridge to keep our eye on the charge, and we watched them come by. Walking dogged they were, with a fixed sort of stare, and some were asleep as they marched, and some were whistling through lips that made no noise. The sweat was caked on them, and they were grey from head to foot, and the officers were staggering up and down cheering them on—for those lads had been going without rest at all for ten days and more. And one of the sergeants said to me as he went by, he said, ‘There are thousands of them, and they’re close behind.’ When they had gone I went to Mr. O’Rourke and I said to him, ‘It’s close work it’s going to be, sir, I’m thinking, for they are near behind.’

“And then up galloped a staff officer.

“‘Are you the Engineer officer in charge?’ he said.

“‘I am that,’ said Mr. O’Rourke.

“‘There are still two squadrons of Lancers between you and the Germans,’ he said, ‘and they will be across soon, for they are only covering the Infantry who have just gone over. When they are over blow up the bridge, and do not linger to admire the view, for it will be unhealthy.’

“‘Very good, sir,’ says Mr. O’Rourke.

“‘And,’ says he, ‘let there be no mistake, for the love of Heaven; for should the charge fail we are undone. This bridge is the most important of any there are to be destroyed, and they must not get it.’

“‘They will not get it,’ says Mr. O’Rourke; and with that he galloped away. When he had gone we walked off the bridge. ‘Pray Heaven, Cassidy,’ he said, ‘that all is well, for we will not have much time, if there is a fault, to adjust it.’

“‘It will be all right, sir,’ said I, ‘for we have it tested.’

“‘And then the Cavalry started coming back.

“‘Clear out, you boys,’ shouted an officer; ‘they are in touch with us, and we cannot hold them longer.’

“‘Cassidy,’ said Mr. O’Rourke, ‘take the men back, for it is no good them stopping here.’

“‘Would we be leaving you, sir?’ I cried.

“‘You would not,’ he said; ‘but what good can you do? for if the charge fails there will be no time to relay it, and if it succeeds ’twill be easier for me to get away alone than if you are all here.’

“I saw his point, and I knew he was right—though it went against the grain to leave him in the lurch, as it were. But he would not alter, and so I took them away—muttering and cursing they were. I took them to a little rise under cover two or three hundred yards away, where it was easy to clear from when the bridge was down without being fired on. Before I went I said to him, I said, ‘We will be yonder, and it’s there we will wait for you. If you go that way round you can get there easily.’ Just after we got there we saw a major gallop over the bridge with his orderly behind him, and he shouted something to Mr. O’Rourke. We saw him running to the exploder and fixing the leads, and then he paused and straightened himself up behind the tree. From where we were we could see two Uhlans coming near the bridge, with more of them, hundreds of them, behind. And then he forced down the handle of the exploder. ‘Mother of Heaven!’ I screamed, for nothing happened. He did it again, and it failed again. You will mind, sir, that from where he was he could not see the Uhlans and they could not see him—but we could see both of them from the rise. The men were sobbing and cursing. A corporal caught my arm, and he muttered, ‘It was not to fail,’ he said, ‘and it has. What will we do?’ ‘What can we?’ I said, ‘for they are on the bridge.’ And then of a sudden we saw the lad creeping along under cover of the trees, and he reached the bridge and ran like a hare to the charge. The Uhlans saw him too, and rode at him; and the men

started screaming and cheering, for they were off their heads, and they thought he would be able to do something. 'But what can he do?' I groaned, 'for the fuse will not burn quick enough. They are too close.' He reached the charge first, and his revolver was drawn. It was drawn, I say, but it was not at the Uhlans it pointed. For a second he stood there, with his head thrown back, and it seemed to us as if he laughed at them. And the lads saw what was in his mind, and they were silent—saving only one, and he threw himself on the ground sobbing. And the Uhlans saw what was in his mind, and one pulled his horse over backwards trying to get off the bridge, while the other rode at him. And then he fired. From the range of an inch he fired into the gun-cotton, and the roar of the detonation shook the heaven. And he and the Uhlans disappeared. They were there one minute and the next they were not. And then, with a great sort of rending crash, the whole thing fell into the river below.

"We looked for a moment and then we stumbled away—and the most of us could not see with ease, for the lads had loved him well."

Cassidy paused and looked into the fire.

"So it was not a failure," I said softly as I left him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHARGE OF THE COOKS

I WONDER if by chance you recall the fat lad that was cook for the officers' mess when we used to go on the manœuvres in England," remarked Cassidy to me one day. We were strolling slowly through the Park, getting his foot into work again; but scenting one of his more expansive moments, I suggested a seat.

"A great lad he was," he went on when we had made ourselves comfortable, "and it was cook he was for the officers over yonder. You recall his name, sir—Michael M'Doolan. 'Tis true that he was not the equal of a French chef, but he was a worthy lad to work under our doctor, of which same gentleman and his way with the people I have already told you. Of course you will understand, sir, that before we came into the billets, and whenever we are fighting, the doctor has no time to do anything but his job, and so 'tis the cook who does what he can for the officers, such as milking any cow the owner has forgotten about, or the like.

"I remember one day—we had come up to where we are now, sir—it being a day in November, and

we were all working pretty hard just then. You'll mind, sir, our hours are different to the others, for we are on always, and we never know when we shall be wanted or where we have to go. The officers all go out each night with parties of men and work in front of the trenches and on the different jobs, and come back in the morning—when they want a bit of food before they go to sleep. 'Tis the same with the men. They all come back into the farm or the dug-out behind the firing-line, where they get a chance of lying up during the day.

“In the place where we were then the officers were in a farm. 'Twas a bit draughty, as there was more hole than wall, owing to the shells, and it was not over-distant from the firing-line itself, but hidden from it by a little hill. On the day I speak of I was walking from my own bit of a pigsty to their farm, when I felt the zip of a bullet as it went past my head. Thinks I to myself, ‘That was as close as was convenient,’ when another one zips past too. I was taking no risks, so I jumped into the ditch, the better to think. ‘If there is not a blackguard drawing on me,’ I says to myself, ‘may I never again see Ballygoyle; but where is it that he is, for it is not in the firing-line that he can be?’ seeing, as I have told you, we were hidden from it by a hill. I crept along the ditch to the officers’ farm, and there I finds M’Doolan. The officers and men were all out, but he was not alone, for there were gathered with him behind the wall of the farm the four other cooks for the mess.

“‘What the devil are you all doing here?’ I said, as I got out of the ditch. ‘Is it a mothers’ meeting that it is, or why are you not at the dinners?’

“‘Do you see the farm yonder?’ says M’Doolan, pointing to one we could just see.

“‘I do,’ says I, following his finger.

“‘They have us marked from there,’ he says. ‘There are three of them, I think, and it’s sniping us they’ve been for the last two hours.’

“‘’Twas from there, was it,’ I says, ‘that it came?’ and I looked through a hole at the farm.

“‘Have they been at you, Sergeant?’ they says.

“‘Why else would I be in the ditch?’ says I. ‘I am not after training as a Boy Scout.’

“‘At that moment there came another shot. There was a terrible ‘cluck,’ and all was still. M’Doolan, he jumped up and rushed out before we could stop him, shouting, ‘The devils, the devils!’ at the top of his voice.

“‘Come back, you fool,’ I cried, and went out and pulled him in. I pulled him in, I say, but he was peering through the different holes in the wall like a man possessed.

“‘Was it a cluck I heard behind there?’ he says—in a terrible way he was—‘was it a cluck, for if so ’twas Rosie.’

“‘Rosie,’ I says, ‘what are you talking about, and who’s your Rosie at all?’

“‘It was,’ he cries, peering through one of the holes, ‘for I can see her—and it’s dead she is.’

I looked out and I saw a hen lying in the corner with most of its feathers off, and she certainly did not look very lively.

"'Tis only a hen,' I cried in disgust. 'Away with you and your Rosie.'

"'Tis not that,' he says; 'tis the Major. 'Tis terrible particular he is about getting his egg in the morning when he comes in, and when we comes here a week ago I found little Rosie. She was the only one left, and saving only that an ammunition wagon passed over her the day before yesterday she has been doing well. Oh! 'tis a terrible thing she has passed away, Sergeant.

"'Why, only this morning she failed to do her duty, and when I went out there was nothing. The Major he says, "M'Doolan," he says, "where the deuce is the Hen Fruit? Hen fruit, you fool!" he cries, irritable-like, when I looks at him puzzled, "produce of the feathered biped—egg?"'

"'She has misfired, sir,' I says. 'Tis either the wagon which passed over her two days ago, or else the round of ammunition she ate yesterday—but she is looking unwell.'

"'Well, put her in a corner and sing to her this morning," he says, "and she'll either lay an egg or the bullet—but for Heaven's sake get hold of eggs somehow."

"'Well, I was doing my best. I had her in the corner over there, and it was hypnotising her I was. She was standing on one leg, and something was

happening. I was clucking to her, when a bullet went between my legs from that same devil yonder. So I hopped it, but little Rosie stayed on, for I watched her, and 'tis an egg she would have laid before evening, for it was in earnest she was. And now what will I be after saying to the Major about it at all?

“ ‘Tis rot you're talking,’ I says. ‘If the hen has been shot—and, bedad, after it had been run over by a wagon, and had eaten a round of ammunition, and had been looked at by you close, 'twas a merciful end for the poor bird—why are you five great hulking blatherers here? Away with you, and capture the house and the snipers. Are not five Sappers enough to do it, even if they are cooks?’

“ ‘Less of your even and your cooks, Sergeant,’ says one. ‘We will do it at once.’

“ ‘Bedad! sir,” laughed Cassidy, “you'd have laughed to see those five. M'Doolan elected himself the commander, and off they went up the ditch in great style, for all the world like a herd of hippopotamuses going to water. I followed them to see the fun. When they came to the end of the ditch they were still about two hundred yards from the house where they were. You'll mind, sir, the line was a bit mixed up just there, and there were a lot of the German snipers behind our own lines and all over the place. M'Doolan in a voice like a foghorn, gathered them together behind a refuse-heap and explained the situation.

“ ‘Two of you,’ he says, ‘will fire at the devils from

here, to keep them engaged like, while we three will go round the back and rush them,' and away they crept. The two that were left behind were not in a manner of speaking marksmen, but as they had not fired a shot since the beginning they were all over it. They plastered the house and the ground and the refuse-heap they were lying behind with bullets, and one of them struck a cow in the next field—leastways with a bellow of pain she disappeared towards the trenches.

“But the diversion served, for the snipers had all their attention on the refuse-heap, and M'Doolan and his two warriors reached the back unobserved. They crept up the stairs, and M'Doolan had his gun in one hand and Rosie in the other, for he was minded she should revenge herself. There were only two of them there, and they were occupied, as I have said, with the two outside. They crept into the room, and then with a whoop they were on them. M'Doolan tackled one. He hit him in the stomach with his rifle and in the face with Rosie, so that he dropped his gun and started praying. The other two had not their rifles, but one of them hit the second German over the head with a bottle of curry powder, while the other collared him by the legs. The first of them was trying to get Rosie's foot out of his mouth, and the other was sneezing curry when I got there; and it was a great diversion, for M'Doolan was taking no risks, and he still had them covered with his gun, while the other

two were trying to gather up what was left of the curry powder.

“Murderers!” roars M’Doolan, brandishing Rosie in front of them, “could you not have let her be while she laid her last egg? You Huths, you Gons!” he says, getting a trifle mixed. “’Tis my prisoners you are.” With that he seized them both, and when the other two had taken their guns he marched them out. ’Twas a great procession. We went down the road with the Germans in front, the one plucking curry powder from his mouth and the other feathers. The first man we ran into was the Major.

“What the devil is this!” he cries, putting up his eyeglass.

“We have avenged the death of Rosie, sir,” says M’Doolan, holding up the hen. “Those two devils slaughtered her as she was getting ready to lay the egg for your breakfast to-morrow.”

“Great Scott!” says he, “let’s hear about it.”

“So M’Doolan told him the story. When he had finished the Major looked at him and then he looked at the Germans. One had still got his teeth full of feathers and the other was covered with a sort of yellow foam. Lastly he looked at the hen, and then he laughed.

“Take ’em away,” he says to me; “take ’em away, and send ’em to headquarters with my compliments.”

“But Rosie, sir,” says M’Doolan. “Is it roast or boiled you will have her?”

“The Major he looks at M’Doolan and laughs again.

'Tis a second Napoleon you are, M'Doolan,' he says, 'and it is well you have done to capture them two; but with regard to your cooking, do which you like, for we will not know the difference.'"

CHAPTER V

THE SPY

IT seems strange," I remarked one morning to Sergeant Cassidy, as we sat together in the Park, whither he had hobbled on his crutches, "that those fellows run their spy system so well. Why aren't they spotted more easily?" Only that morning I had been reading in the paper of a German officer who had spent some four or five days behind the British lines, his identity only being suspected when he was back safely behind his own again.

"Maybe, sir, maybe," answered my guide and counsellor. "But 'tis not so strange after all, when you come to think of it. For when a man dressed as a French officer comes behind the English lines, and another dressed as an English officer is himself behind the French, 'tis hard to tell where you are. For our knowledge of the language is not all it might be, and 'tis hard to tell if it's a German talking English or a Frenchman—even for the officers."

Reluctantly I was compelled to admit that my gardener's unhealthy wish for pens, ink, and paper, and my aunt's notorious predilection for cheese in all forms—the only blot on our otherwise stainless es-

cutcheon—which in the days of my youth I had so frequently translated into perfect French, had not fitted me for the onerous task of spy-hunting behind the lines.

“But, bedad, it’s right that you are, sir,” continued Cassidy, when he had temporarily taken over my cigarette case. “They are extraordinary—the way they send men behind our lines and find things out, and no one can deny that those same men are full of pluck. For they know the penalty when they are found out—and there is not much glory over their work at all. They do what our own officers would not like the doing of, because they would be after thinking it was dirty work.

“I mind me once when we caught one of them at it. ’Twas more by luck than anything else that we did that same, but ’tis a story that bears the telling.”

A temporary lull occurred at that moment, owing to the excitement of his catching what I believe is known as the “glad-eye” from a passing fairy, and very nearly slipping off the seat. When he had waved his crutch twice, and comparative calm again reigned, I ventured to recall the great man to the affairs of earth.

“Tell me about the spy, Cassidy,” I said firmly.

“What a peach!” he murmured. “Begorra—a darling; and ’tis Irish she was with her eyes.” He sighed deeply. “But ’tis of the spy you would be hearing, sir. For the proper understand of what I would be telling you, it is clear you must know how the firing line is

at the present moment—and what the lads are after doing. You will mind that there are farmhouses—dotted they are all over the place—and barns and old mills and the like. Those same barns were occupied by the Germans in most cases before they were taken over by us as we pushed them back. Of course, as you know, they have not moved at all lately, but I am speaking of maybe two or three months ago. What was easier than for those fellows to leave a stray man or two behind them who was able to talk the English or French, and put a telephone or the like in one of those same barns which was connected with their own lines, and where they knew they would be?

“You will mind also that the lingo they speak up in the North, where they are now, has a heathenish sound to it, and a man might be a German or a Jew from Patagonia before one was the wiser for it. And there is another thing too, sir, that you must be after bearing in mind, and that is the importance of this same spying. For with the aeroplanes and the like, ’tis impossible to move the lads during the day, as it is seen they would be, and any big massing of them is bound to be known. So ’tis at night that the moves are done, and ’tis then that these fellows come in. For you will mind that, with the line as it is, if maybe a bit of a hill like is captured—though it may only be an advance of a few hundred feet—yet the new position may enfilade their line, and when the guns are brought up may cause them great uneasiness for two or three miles. Then maybe the winning of that little

bit of ground may allow our lads to get the range of a railway they are using, or the like. So you will see, sir, that those little advances are much more important than they would appear in the papers; but the success of them depends on secrecy, and if 'tis given away beforehand by a spy, the lads have no chance.

"We were in a farm at the time. 'Twas a funny old bird that had that same farm, all screwed up and wizened like. The boys called him Gilbert the Filbert—and his appearance was like to a monkey that had not washed for months. It was all alone in the farm he was, so the interpreter told me—you mind that all our regiments and batteries yonder have a French interpreter with them—and his wife had died of the shock when the Germans had been in the farm.

"I says to him, I says when he told me, 'By the Holy Saints,' I says, 'if the old lady's face was like most of those I've seen creeping about round here, 'twas probably a heavy casualty list those Boches had themselves when they see her.'

"We never saw him most of the day. Down in the café he was, they said—or rather 'estaminet,' as they call 'pubs' in those parts—drinking to drown his grief. The old devil! 'Twas great the way he had us boiled. Well, one morning the General he comes round to the farm, and his staff with him. I misremember what actually he had come for; 'twas an inspection or something, but 'tis of no account. When 'twas all over the officer gentlemen were sitting in the farm having a bit of lunch, and from what Mr. Tracy told

me after, the General was talking a bit open like about the intentions of the big guns, and what they were going to do. Nothing much, you mind me, but things it would be inconvenient for them German lads to know. Now, in that farm we were in then there was a cellar—they have them in many of them—where they keep the beer and the like.”

Cassidy paused a moment and laid his hand on my arm. “While I think of it, sir,” he said impressively, “when you get there, be careful of that same beer—for ’tis cold on the stomach it lies, and there is but little warmth in it.”

I duly noted the fact, for when an expert speaks it behooves all who can to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest.

“As I was after saying,” he went on, after a short but solemn pause, “there was a cellar in this same farm, and one way of reaching it was from the room where the officers were sitting. As luck would have it, the lad who was the cook—that same M’Doolan of whom I have already told you—had run short of milk, and the officers were thinking a little hot milk and rum would be good for their health. The Doctor—the lad that had the way with him—was a great believer in it as a medicine, and the Major, I am told, did not disagree with him on the matter. So M’Doolan was in a great way, for the General was minded to try it, and devil a drop of the cow oil was there. He was shouting for Gilbert, and making a noise he said was like a cow, for not a word of the lingo could he speak.

'Twas a terrible commotion, and when he came outside to find the old man, making this noise, we thought the ration lorry was upset.

" ' 'Tis not another drop the old cow will lay if she hears you,' I says.

" 'I cannot find Gilbert,' says he, 'and the General is dying of thirst and the cold.'

" Away he goes, and for some reason he went into the cellar, for there was another way in besides the one I have told you of. He gets in, and, bedad, he had not been gone a minute before there was a noise like a Black Maria inside.

" ' 'Tis the cow,' I cried. 'He has her caught, and it's milking her he is.'

" ' 'Tis not,' he cries. ' 'Tis Gilbert, and 'tis a spy he is, the dirty devil.' And with that he comes up with the old farmer man. He had him by the back of the neck, and his clasp knife was in his other hand, to make him move the faster. 'I found him,' he says, 'with his ear at the door of the officers' room, and 'tis listening he was to the General.'

" And then, as you may think, there was the devil and all. The lads came running, and the officers appeared, and the General, wiping his moustache, for without the necessary milk they had been drinking it neat.

" 'What is it at all?' he says, 'and why is there all this commotion?'

" ' 'Tis a spy, sir,' says M'Doolan, 'and it's his ear he had to the door when I caught him.'

" And then a change came over them all, and they

became very silent. The Major puts in his eyeglass and looks at the men. 'You may dismiss,' says he, quiet like, and they dismissed. The General he looked at the farmer, and then he turned to the Major.

"'Is this the source,' says he, 'of the leakage of information?' For I may tell you, sir, that though at the time I did not know of that same—Mr. Tracy, he told me after—there had been a great leakage, and the reason had them all beat. 'What have you to say?' he says, and he turned to the farmer.

"The farmer he stood there, sullen like, for it was afraid to move he was, seeing that M'Doolan's clasp knife was touching his neck.

"'Comprends pas,' he says, or some such words, though not knowing the language I could not say exact like.

"'Go down, Tracey,' says the Major, 'and search the cellar'; and Mr. Tracey he went off. While he was away we were all silent, and the General's face was stern, for we knew without the searching. In a few minutes Mr. Tracey came back, and in his hand he held a telephone.

"' 'Twas under the sacks, sir,' he says to the General. 'I cut the leads and here it is.'

"The General looked at the telephone, and then at the farmer. 'What have you to say?' he says, and his voice was terrible to hear.

"I was watching the farmer, and 'twas a strange sight, for on the sudden he seemed to change. He realised 'twas the end, and he straightened himself

up. 'Twas acting he'd been, and he was not an old man at all. He brought his heels together and stood to attention, giving him look for look.

"'Nothing,' he says.

"'You know the penalty?' says the General.

"'I do,' he says, and he did not falter.

"'I suppose it was the change in him, but the Brigade Major he gives a start and then he looks at him close. 'Good God!' he says, 'were you not shooting with Lord ——?'— he mentioned one of the quality—'were you not shooting with him last year?'

"'I was, Major Drayton,' says he, and his voice was cold.

"'Major Drayton turns away, and his mouth was sneering, for he liked not finding him a spy.

"'Is there any letter you wish to write?' says the General. 'I will send it for you when I have read it.'

"'There is not,' he says, still standing stiff and rigid like.

"'Is there anything you would wish to say?' says the General.

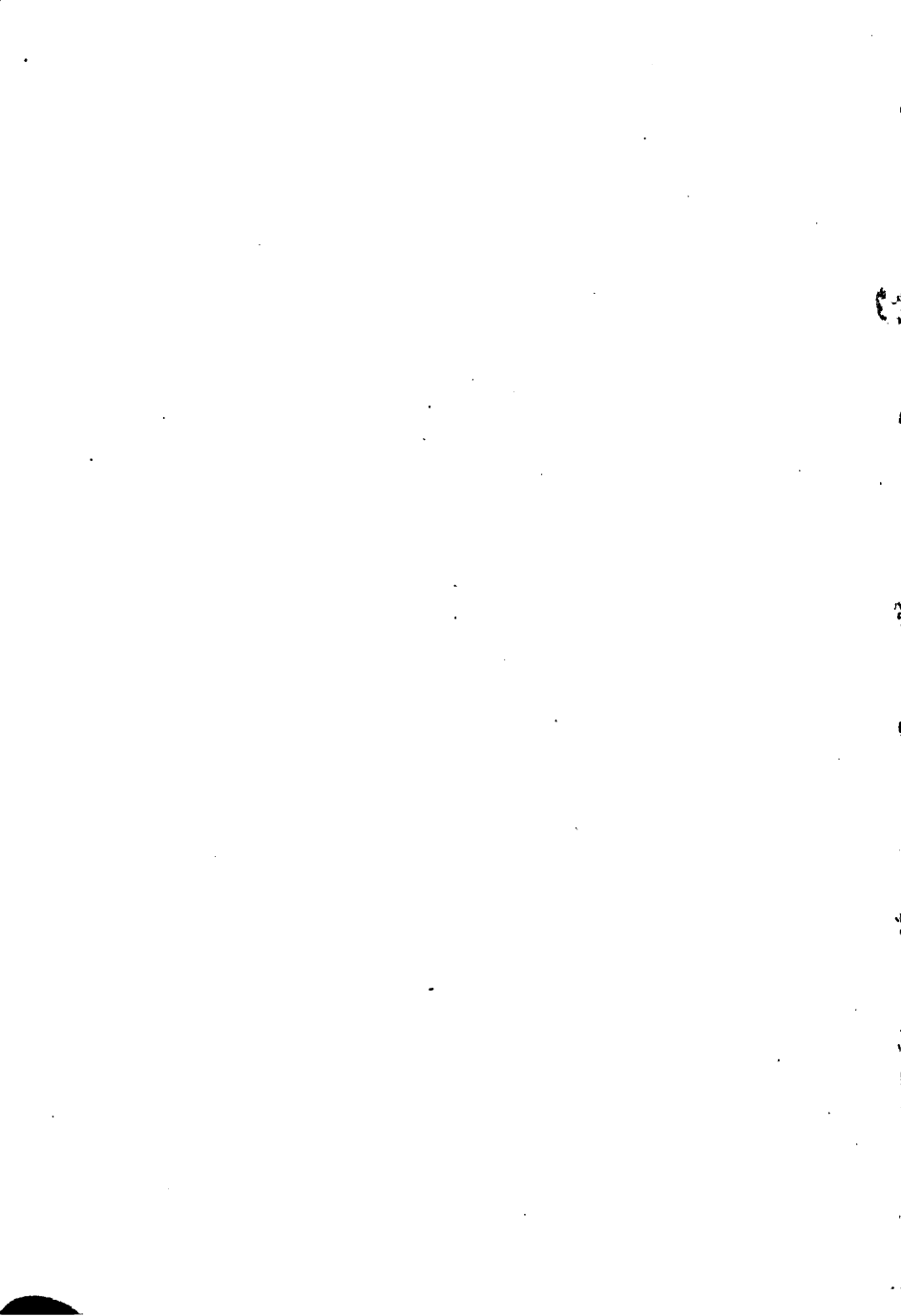
"'One thing, and one thing only,' says he, and his voice rang out clear and loud. I remember it well, for the lads were looking from the barn to see what was occurring. 'We have different ideas,' he says, 'you and I. There are thousands of us doing this—glorying in it—for 'tis the work of a man. I am of the Prussian Army, and I tell you that your day is over. For you English your star is setting—you have ceased to be a great nation—you are on the wane. What mat-

ter my death? There are others. For years we have prepared, we have made ready, we have waited—and now your hour has come. It is *der Tag*,’ and he raised his hand above his head.

“Everyone was silent, and the General was silent too, for the man was terribly in earnest. At last the General spoke, and his voice was not terrible any more. ‘We will not argue the matter,’ he said. ‘As you say, we see things differently. Perhaps in time you and your nation will find that you have made a terrible mistake, and that the star of England has not set, but is blazing fiercer than ever.’ And then he paused, and the officers round stood stiffly—just like the German—and one, I remember, caught his breath in a sob almost, for he was young and just out. ‘There is no more to be said,’ went on the General, ‘and as you have no letter to write I will not delay. You will be shot in half an hour.’

“The German he saluted, and not a muscle of his face moved.

“’Twas very gravely and quietly the officers saluted too, for, German or no German, spy or no spy, he was a brave man.”



CHAPTER VI

MUD AND NOISE

'TIS a strange war, sir," said Cassidy to me one day, as we watched the ceaseless stream of London traffic through the open window. "'Tis a strange war, and one which makes a man think, and wonder what will be the end of it at all. 'Tis beating them we shall be in the end, but who will be giving us back the friends and the lads we have lost? They tell me we may be after taking money from them to punish them, but will money give back life to those who are lying stiff and stark out yonder—the lads we have fought with, and drunk with, and lived alongside of for years?"

"It's the same in all wars," I answered soberly, for in all faith the thought gives one to think.

"Ah! 'tis different, sir," he said. "Was I not through the South African War, and are you putting this on the same footing at all? Some of these battalions have left at the present moment eight or nine men out of the thousand odd who came out with them in August. Think of it, sir—eight out of a thousand! And where will you be finding the others at all? They are not all dead, I know, but they are

either that or wounded or missing. You cannot conceive it at all, sir. 'Twas only the other day I was talking to a lad home on leave, and he was telling me what it was like in the trenches now. It was a sergeant he was, and they were relieved one night in the ordinary way like by another regiment. They were not going back there again for four days, and when they had formed up behind, and the roll call was being taken, they found one of the lads was missing—at least there were many missing, but it was of this one he was after speaking.

“The other regiment took over the trenches in the dark, and another one took over from them two days later. And then the first regiment went back again to the same place. That night the sergeant happened to go down a bit of a communication trench which the other regiments had not happened to use. At the end he found the man of whom I spoke—the one who was missing. He was wounded and weak, and he was stuck. Stuck, I tell you, stuck in the mud, and it was unable to move that he was. His cries had not been heard, and for four days and four nights had the lad been there. They got him out just before he died. 'Twas no one's fault—just sheer bad luck—but it shows what those trenches are like these days; though no one can realise what they really are till he has actually seen them. If you imagine a gateway into a field, which is not metalled, when there has been a rare lot of rain, and lots of horses and wagons and the like have been in and out, and then think of that same

condition it is in being four feet deep and mixed with an Irish bog, 'tis a fair idea you have of some of the communication trenches.

"Bedad, sir, they cannot realise it at home here at all. Sure they are shown in the pictures as happy and laughing—them lads in the trenches—and 'tis laughing they are, for if they were not 'tis mad they would be for the horror of it. You have not heard it yet, sir, the noise. 'Tis the noise that is the devil, and 'tis almost impossible to describe what that noise is like to you. There's the whistle of their rifle bullets at times as they pass over your head. 'Tis a sound, you know, like the drone of bees on a summer's night, and the thud, thud, as they hit the parapet in front of you. Then there's the bark of their maxims—a coughing sort of noise it is, sharp and clear cut—three or four shots at one time, and then maybe a great long bark for half a minute. And 'tis not one only, for the other guns take it up, and it seems continuous like all along their line.

"And then the shells. Their shrapnel is not much anyway, though 'tis dirty the bullets are, and an ugly wound they give one. But 'tis the dirt of the bullets more than their speed that has one caught. The big ones are different. 'Tis a strange noise they make. 'Tis like a huge hornet or maybe a big cock-chafer, like those one meets in the August evenings on the hills. You hear those Marias come buzzing out of the sky, and they pass over one's head with a droning sort of noise. And then they burst. 'Tis a big sort

of 'plonk' they make, and the dirt and the mud fly around. There's a great cloud of smoke too, and yet they look far worse than they are. Of course, as you will guess, sir, if they burst in the trench 'tis mighty unpleasant for those that are in the vicinity; and if they burst near the trench as like as not the side will fall in, and some of the lads will be buried, but generally 'tis dug out they can be.

"And then there's the little fellow filled with high explosives, and it's a nasty little devil that he is, for he sounds angry and he bursts angry. Bedad! the noise is awful, for there are all our own lads firing as well, and our guns and the speling of our maxims. And by the holy saints, if you happens to get near where a battery of those French 75's is, you'd think your ears would be split. Mind you, sir, it is not always so. I was in the trench one evening, I remember, and suddenly the firing seemed to die away. Gradually it ceased, and I pulled out my watch. 'Twas half-past five, and for about ten minutes there was not a sound. 'Twas still, absolutely still, and the men looked at one another, for the silence sounded so strange. 'Twas very funny—that sudden deathly stillness. The men was almost talking in whispers. And then a man fired—just one chance shot—and in a second they was at it again. But 'twas strange, that silence—very strange."

Cassidy paused, and as I handed him my cigarette case, I wondered if perchance for those few minutes the dread Harbinger himself had stayed his hand,

appalled at the richness of his harvest and the insensate stupidity of his playthings. And then his cynical laugh as the crack of a rifle started him yet once again on the pilgrimage of Death.

"There is another noise you will be after hearing, particularly yourself, sir," he went on after a while. "'Tis the noise of the snipers, and to my way of thinking 'tis the worst of the lot. It's going out you will be at night with the lads to put up wire, or to dig a bit of a trench maybe. Perhaps the guns are still at it, and away in the distance the sky will be like summer lightning. Then dull booms are going on all around you, and occasionally the sky is all lit up by one of them shells that does not explode but goes off like a firework. Maybe you are working in a wood, and every now and then there comes a crack from somewhere, and you hear the zip of a bullet in the ground near you. 'Tis that occasional crack that is the devil, for you do not know where it comes from. And sometimes a man near by gives a little cough, and his shovel clatters against the pick, and when you get to him you find he will not use either again.

"They are the devil, those fellows, for in the majority of cases 'tis just pure luck whether they hit you or whether they do not. Sometimes you will see one in a tree, maybe. He is not moving, but against the dim light in the sky you will see a strange shape—as like as not in a fork. Very likely 'tis only imagination, but perhaps 'tis not; and you'll have a shot, and

if 'tis a good one there will be a crash and something will fall through the branches, and there will be a thud as it hits the ground. But as often as not they tie themselves on to the tree, the better to shoot. They are brave lads, and they stop there, perhaps clean through the day if 'tis a good tree. I remember me finding one once. Shot through the heart he was, and he was still lashed tight, and it's dead he had been for a week.

"And you will bear in mind, sir, that 'tis not all on their side. Whether 'tis true or not, I would not be after saying, but one of our own officers—a captain he is in the Infantry—is said to have two hundred and fifty of them to his own cheek. He creeps out by night with a sergeant, and takes a second gun with his servant as loader, and 'tis great sport that he has.

"'Tis a strange war, that it is. They are all that close to one another," and Cassidy shook his head reflectively. "There is but little sport in it."

"I suppose that is the reason we are being trained in using hand grenades and bombs so particularly," I remarked. "They should be good when one is so close."

"You are right, sir," he said, as he held out his hand for my cigarette case, "though to my way of thinking those things are very often more dangerous to those that throw them than they are to the Germans. You have to be very careful with them, or 'tis yourself will be blown to glory. Take those

hand grenades, for instance. As you know yourself, sir, they explode on percussion, when they hit the ground. You take them in your right hand, and they have streamers behind them to make them fly straight when you throw them, and you hold those same streamers in your left. When you has undone the safety arrangements 'tis all ready to go off. I remember one night one of the Infantry gentlemen had some he was after throwing. He had the range beautifully, he had. 'Tis bowling at cricket one is after doing with them, as you know. You hold them behind your back in your right hand, and sweep up your arm like as you were bowling. Then you lets go with your left of the streamers, and away she flies.

“ 'Twas great execution he was doing. He had, as I say, the range grand, and he had them all thrown save only the last. 'Twas one particular bit in their trench he was minded to reach with this last one, and a bit farther it was than he had thrown before. So he made a great effort, and he hit the back of his own trench with the grenade as it came up. 'Tis the danger, and the thing of which you must mind—for you will not do it a second time. Those things explode just as easily when they hit the ground in an English trench as when 'tis a German they fall into. There was but little left of the poor gentleman, and six men was dead, too, when they came to look from behind the next traverse.

“Then there's that other sort of bomb, there is,

shoot, so sick were they with the awful butchery of it. 'Tis not that they are soft-hearted. If one of the lads, as you know, gets his dander up, the devil himself standing at the mouth of hell, would not be after stopping him.

"'Twas in one of the Cavalry regiments that a little thing happened, which I was seeing. One of the officer gentlemen found a wounded German officer close to our trenches, and in the general clean-up after one of their attacks—'twas when the Cavalry were in the trenches—he gave him a drink out of his water bottle. He took it—and I would tell you that it was a Prussian he was—he took it, I say, and as the Cavalry officer turned to go away, the Prussian drew his revolver and shot him dead from behind. 'Twas a big Irishman that saw it done, in the officer's troop, and for a second he stood stock still—for it was not believing his eyes that he was. Then he came to himself, and he bellowed like a bull. He took one leap at the Prussian, and he had his gun in his hand. The Prussian pointed his revolver again, but before his hand was half up, the lad hit it with the butt of his rifle. The revolver went west, and his arm was cracked like glass. 'Twas making strange noises that the Irishman was, and his face was working like a man in a fit. He screamed curses at him, and his language was terrible to hear; for the lads were watching, though without a proper understanding of what had occurred. And then the lad raised his gun, and his bayonet was on the end. 'Twas a fierce sight,

for with a grunt like a pig he spitted the Prussian's head to the ground, and the steel was six inches into the ground on the other side; and when he took his hands away the rifle stood upright, quivering, with the Prussian pinned like a beetle in a box.

"That is one thing, and when the lads heard what had happened they was like men whose women have been touched. But those Germans are not all like that, and 'tis a great mistake to think that they are. They are brave soldiers, and they are gallant soldiers, and it is not the lads who have met them who would be after denying it. And 'tis the terrible, the hideous slaughter which goes on when they make one of their mass attacks that tends almost to sicken the boys, for it does not agree always with their ideas of what is sporting. And that tendency must not be encouraged, sir, for we are at war, and 'tis not kid gloves one can wear for that same thing. That's why I say that things like that Christmas truce are dangerous. What would we have been after doing had the lads received orders for the attack that day? for whatever discipline one may have, sir, human nature is human nature, and when you have worn a man's hat and drunk his beer, 'tis hard to stick a bayonet into his stomach.

"'Twas queer some of the stories that went around about that same truce. In some places it lasted for the whole day, and in some for but half an hour or an hour. 'Tis really an amazing thing when you come to think into it, sir. For weeks and months you have

been lying opposite these men, and your one idea has been to kill them before they were after killing you. Then sudden like you go out and ask them how their mother is, and whether the children are over the chicken-pox or not. You drink with them, you smoke with them, you sing with them, knowing full well that in a few hours you will be at it all over again, and the man you have your arm through will be trying to put a bullet in your brain.

"The officers were more stand-offish like, and they generally quarrelled over who started the war, for those Germans are just as certain that we did it as we are that they did. And as there is no method of proof—leastways none available out there—the meeting was apt to break up in confusion, there being no end to the argument save calling the other man a liar, which is apt to be taken more seriously out there than it would be, say, at the races at Ballygoyle, where 'tis a term of affection.

"Another strange thing there was about it, and that is the ignorance of some of their lads about the state of affairs. 'Twas extraordinary. Says one of them to one of our lads, he says, 'Why do you go on?' he says. 'You are beaten, and you know it, and 'twould be more healthy for you to make peace now, as it is not hard we would be upon you. You are brave men, and so are we, and brave men should live, not die.'

"Our lad, he looks at one of his pals and laughs.

'Tis beat we are, is it? And why are you after saying that?'

"'Why,' says the German, 'do you not know? Paris is in our hands, and the French are finished, and our Zeppelins float over your London every day. Shortly great ships will leave filled with troops for England—when we have sunk the rest of your fleet.'

"'Say, Copper Nob,' for it was red-headed the German was, 'you've got the wrong end of the blooming onion.' Our lads were laughing. 'There weren't no Zeppelins over London the last time I was there; and have you ever heard of the Falkland Islands? As to Paris, the officer yonder spent his week's leave there, and it's just come back that he is. Some one's been kidding you, old dear; for 'tis you that are beat—not us.'

"'You have been deceived, my poor fellow,' says the German.

"'Oh! cheese it with your poor fellow,' says the lad; and as his tone was annoyed like, the officer who had been to Paris comes up to stop any trouble. 'Tis beat, he says we are, sir,' said the lad, 'and 'tis Paris he says they have. Have you not just come from that same place yourself?'

"The officer laughed, for 'twas a dangerous subject, and he was mindful to drop it—but Copper Nob would not have it. 'Am I to understand,' he says, 'that you have been to Paris lately?'

"'I returned ten days ago,' says the officer.

"'But 'tis invested by us,' says the German.

“‘I think not,’ says the officer with a smile. ‘There are none of your people within forty miles of Paris, in that part that you may have heard of—Soissons.’

“‘It is incredible that you—an officer—do not know the truth,’ says Copper Nob. He looked pityingly at him for a moment, and then his face changed. ‘Ah!’ he says—‘I see. But you are a brave man, and a clever man, and is it fair to these men?’

“‘With that he went away, and left the officer looking surprised. ‘What the devil is the little blighter talking about?’ he says. ‘Is what fair? and anyway what the blazes is he after meaning at all?’

“‘I’ve got it, sir,’ says a sergeant who was by. ‘He thinks you knows all about it, and that the officers are keeping the men in ignorance of what has took place, the better to encourage them.’

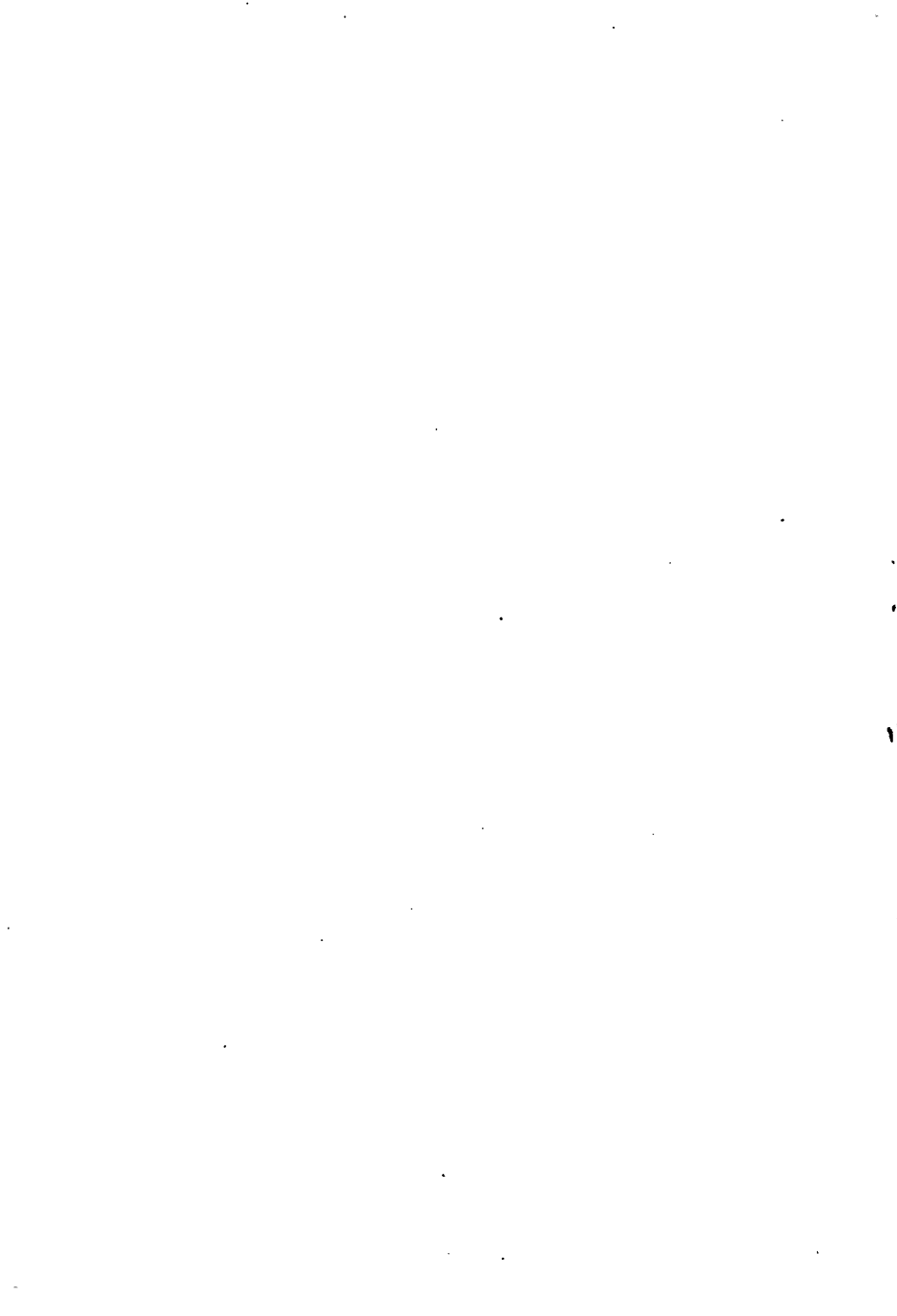
“‘And that is a thing which is important, sir, to my way of thinking, and which must not be overlooked. For to my way of looking at it, it is immaterial what is really true as far as the soldier is concerned. For his spirits to be kept up, as long as what he believes is true, is good; he will carry on, and all will be well. And those German lads have been guyed up with stories, and all they think is that we are the lads who have been deceived. They are just as certain that our newspapers are lying—these soldiers in the trenches, I mean—they are just as certain of that fact, as we are that theirs are. So where are you at all?’”

“‘But you can’t guy the big business men like that,

Cassidy," I said. "They will find out soon that all is not well."

"Maybe, sir, maybe," he answered. "Of that you would be knowing better than me; and 'twould be strange, when they find out the real truth, if it did not make a difference. But all I can tell you is this: that as far as their soldiers are concerned 'tis beat they think we are; and they are utterly convinced that we are all being kept in ignorance of what is really occurring."

And I think perhaps that the near-finish optimists might do well to ponder the utterances of Sergeant Michael Cassidy.



CHAPTER VIII

THE HEAVY LIEUTENANT'S PRISONER

I WAS mentioning to you the last time you were round of the mining and of the sapping they are after doing over yonder," remarked Cassidy to me one day. "'Tis unpleasant, that it is, and no gentleman's way of fighting at all. Sure, there's enough death in the air without having to look for it under the ground as well. Moreover, as you can imagine, sir, there is nothing that so tends to shake the nerves of the lads as the explosion of a mine in the neighbourhood, for 'tis unhealthy for all concerned.

"'Tis a favourite trick, and one which is done on both sides, to mine one of your own trenches. The gun-cotton is buried and the leads are taken away to the rear, being hidden too. Earlier in the proceedings, when everyone was not so suspicious like as they are now, the lads would get out of the bit of trench that was mined, and creep away to one in the rear during the night. When the Germans saw the trench was unoccupied—maybe they would discover it the same night when some of their creepers was on the war-path—'twas great excitement they was thrown into, thinking 'twas a retirement or the like. Like

as not, the next morning there they would be. And then there would be a great tearing roar, and the mud and stones and—other things would rush up to the sky. A great stillness followed, and 'twas all over.

"'Tis a terrible form of warfare, for 'tis so relentless like, so cold-blooded. One's blood is not up—'tis not fighting that one is at the moment. Just the forcing down of the handle of the exploder, and forty or fifty of them is gone. Can one yet realise the thoughts of the lad who is pressing the button? 'Will I give them one minute more?' he says to himself, as the first faint streak of dawn is coming into the sky. And then he unlocks the exploder and raises the handle. He waits a moment, and the lads near him watch him fascinated like. For to bag a man with a gun is one thing; there is sport—there is an element of one against one, like when the quality goes big game shooting. But to bag twenty men by a mine has not the same feeling at all, even if they are Germans. And as the men sit watching, maybe his jaw tightens a little, maybe he laughs a little, or maybe he curses a little, as suddenly he forces the handle down with all his weight, and 'tis all over."

Without speaking I handed him my cigarette case. The War of Moles, with death in the air, and death in the ground, and an enemy one never sees. And yet some one once said there was romance in it!

"Then at times they succeed in getting up near the other trenches with some mine shafts they have run out from their own. 'Tis an important point, maybe,

and 'tis countermining the others are. But you are after knowing the difficulties of that same mining and countermining game, and 'tis an equal chance whether you meet them underground, and get busy with a pick or two—which same is a good weapon, I would tell you.

“Then maybe, as I was saying, 'tis an important place, and 'tis a big attack they will be making. For hours the guns plaster you with their little messages of love, and you sit tight wishing you were at home in a picture show, with one of your best girls. All this time their lads that are going to make the attack are away back, sleeping their last beauty sleep, for 'tis drugs they use greatly, and maybe the idea is good. They give them all something to make them sleep, and then just before they come on they are given something else, which is to buck them up, and give them that feeling which you and me would be after getting when we had drunk well of the whisky.

“Then maybe all is ready, and they are singing and feeling full of the Fatherland when their engineers blows up the mines. 'Tis possible they may blow up great bits of the advanced trench, and all the men as well; and though maybe 'tis knowing they have been that they were mining, yet 'tis always unexpected when it comes, and the lads in the support trenches are sort of dazed like for a while. Then on they come, with officers behind to give them a bit of a reminder, should that happy feeling of the joy of dying for Bill ooze away too quickly, and officers in front

who wish they weren't to lead them. But 'tis not mistaken I would have you, sir. Those attacks are not to be sneezed at. 'Tis marvellous how they come on—drugs or no drugs. Right up to the trenches—dying in rows they are—but on they come. They are brave, and I would not be denying it.

“Then there's a lot of sapping that both sides are after doing as well. They run out a sap-head from the trench, maybe to see what's going on, or maybe to start a mine from, or perhaps just to get a more convenient place to fire from for one of their good shots. 'Tis an absolute rabbit warren, as you can imagine, but 'tis necessary that the location of those same sap-heads should be known more or less exact like, and what is going on in them, so that if they are up to any mischief—and 'tis not sapping you would be doing for fun or because it was a hobby—then you can make one of your own maybe, and scotch them that way. And as the habit of strolling about by day to find out what is the news, and to see if the grass is still green, is unhealthy, and unlikely to give satisfaction at all, save only to the lads opposite, 'tis at night that these little things must be found out. Oh! 'tis a rare lot of creeping goes on between the trenches at night.

“'Twas a funny story I was after hearing the other day of that same creeping. 'Twas a sap-head them Germans had made, and 'twas the opinion of the captain of the company in the trenches just opposite, that 'twas not for the hatching of chickens or the like that it would be used. Also it was not certain that

he was exactly where it lay. So one of the subaltern gentlemen he says to him one night: ' 'Tis out I will go, sir,' he says, 'and find where it is, and what they are doing at all.' He was a stout gentleman was the lieutenant, and one of the boys entirely.

" ' 'Tis well,' said the captain. 'Away with you, but do not linger on the parapet of our trench as you get out, or 'tis a landslip we will be having': for 'twas big round the stomach he was, and heavy.

"Away he creeps, and he had not been gone a minute when a terrible splash was heard, and a great commotion from in front.

" 'What has 'happened?' says the captain. 'Is it bathing that he is?' for there was a great blowing and spitting and spluttering, and terrible language for which that same officer was famed. The lads they listened, and after a while they heard his voice from in front like a fog horn:

" ' 'Tis my prisoner that you are, you rat!' and with a terrible upheaval the stout officer fell into the trench again, and with him a German. Dripping wet they both were and shivering in every limb, for the wind was like ice.

" 'What is it at all?' said the captain, 'and what is the family pet you have with you?' and he looked at the Boche, who was cowering in the corner of the trench.

" 'The rat,' says the lieutenant, when he could speak for the chattering of his teeth—'the rat,' he says, 'was creeping too. 'Twas out there I went, sir,

and creeping I was towards the sap-head, when I met it. Suddenly his face loomed out of the night, and there we was with our noses almost touching. "Are you English?" I says, for I could not see. "Gott in Himmel," says he, and the words were not out of his mouth before I had him. 'Twas by the nose I seized him, for 'tis a great organ, as you will be after seeing, and 'twas close to me, blocking the landscape. I seized him by the nose and an ear, and 'twas struggling he was, so I sat upon him.'

"'Great Scott!' says the captain. 'Poor brute,' and he looks at the German.

"'I sat upon him,' says the subaltern, 'and at that moment the earth gave way. 'Twas on the edge of a Black Maria hole we were, which was filled with water, and it gave way. We were up to our necks in the water, but it was underneath he was, and I sat upon his face for a while—the blackguard. Then I pulled it out, and there it is.'

"'It is killed I will be,' said the little man, for he spoke English after a fashion.

"'Why would you be killed?' said the captain. 'Tis death from suffocation, and death from drowning you have already escaped, and why would you be killed? We do not kill our prisoners,' and he looks at him surprised like.

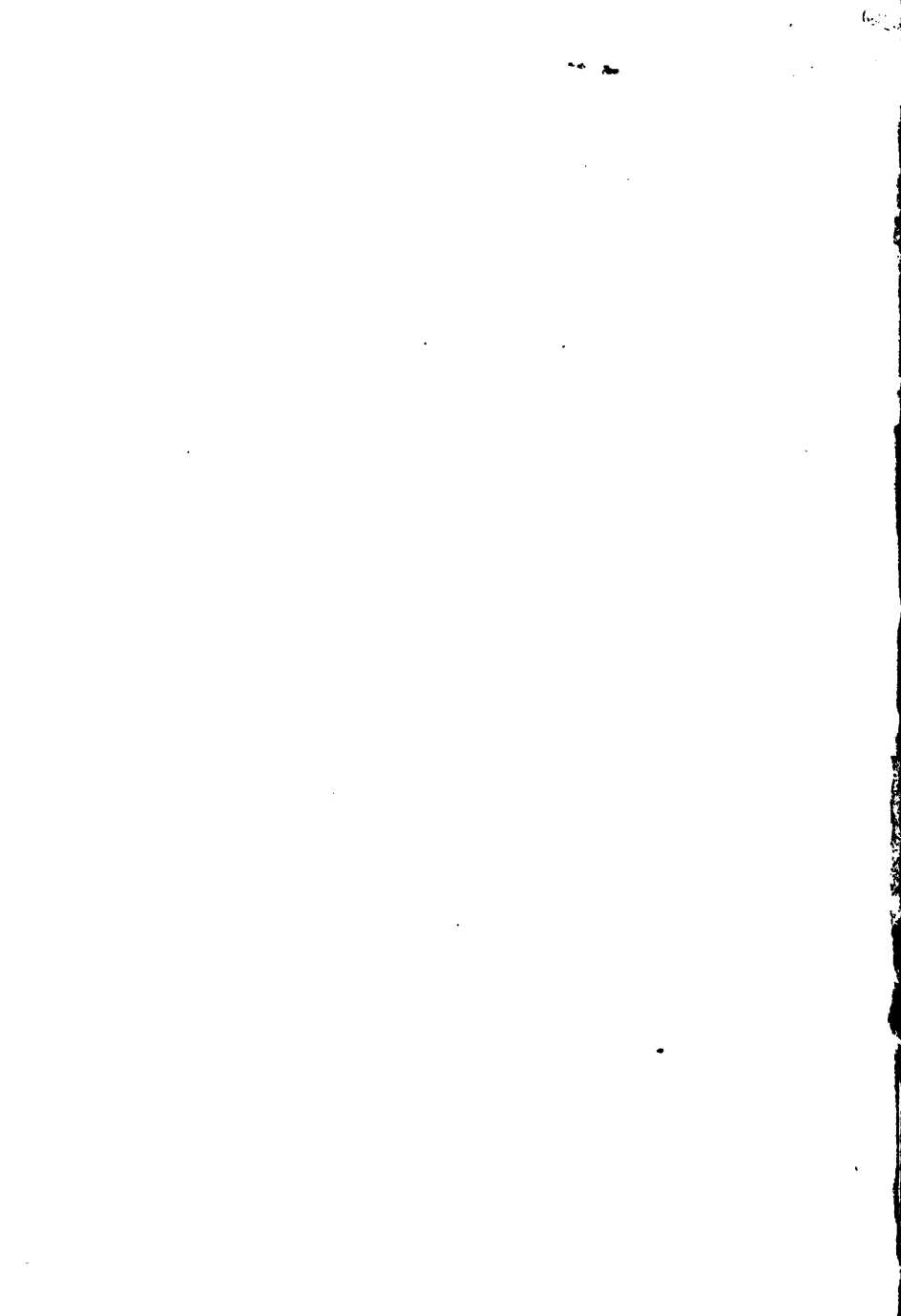
"'Do you not?' he says, 'for they are after telling us all that you do,' and 'twas happy as a king he looked. 'If you do not kill me, I am glad, for maybe

I shall again see London, where I have lived for many years.'

"'Funny little blighter,' says the captain. 'It's like something out of cheese that he is, and 'tis strange notions that he has of how we treat our prisoners.'"

"I hear they tell all their men that they will be killed if they are captured," I said.

"'Tis so, sir," said Cassidy; "and 'tis a thing or two I can tell you that I have seen, if you care to come round another day, on that same subject."



CHAPTER IX

HOW TO BE HAPPY THOUGH WOUNDED

I SUPPOSE that having only had a little fellow of an army in the past," said Cassidy to me one day, "one is after regarding the boys as the family pets, and that is why they look after our wounded so well. From all one is hearing, 'tis the idea with those other lads that once a man is wounded 'tis no more use that he is at all, and 'tis not bothered with him that they will be. Those trains packed with wounded men, and carts and the like, with the blood dripping out of the doorways on to the ground, and terrible groans, of which one reads in the paper, does not strike one as a picnic for Bank Holiday at all.

"'Tis exaggerated it may be, of course, and that I would not be after knowing at all, but 'tis fitting in that it is with their doctrines of hate and their ruthlessness, of which I have heard tell. And 'tis another thing too, sir. They tell their men that we and the French, 'tis the same that we are; and, as you know, their men all think that if they are wounded and fall into our hands it is killed they will be. Do I not remember a little thing that happened a while back? In a wood we were, sitting quiet like, and eating a bit

of bully by way of a diversion. Suddenly we see five of the most terrible-looking objects you have ever seen in your life, tottering through the trees. Filthy they were, and absolutely in rags. 'Twas unable to stand that they were with ease, and the five of them came lurching along, holding one another up.

“‘Saints preserve us,’ says a corporal to me; ‘’tis the chorus from the Gaiety that has blown in.’

“They held up their hands, leastways as many as could do it held them up—which were three hands in all—for, as I should have said before, they were Germans—Uhlans, to be exact.

“‘Walk up, my beauties,’ says I, ‘and it’s hearing we will be of your murky past.’

“Then they came nearer, and when we looked at them closely—well, ’tis nasty things one has seen—but they were the worst. I would not be after telling you what they looked like, but we were all nearly sick.

“‘Water,’ gasped one of them in English. ‘Water, for the love of Heaven!’

“So we gave them water, and, saints preserve us, how those five drank! They lowered pints, and ’twas hideous to watch them.

“‘Away with you,’ I says to one of the lads, ‘and get the doctor if it is not busy that he is, and tell him we have five wounded Germans.’

“The doctor he came along and looked at them, and we watched for a distance, for ’twas not near them we could be with comfort.

“‘Great Heavens!’ he said, ‘how long is it you

have been in the woods with your wounds like this?’

“‘Five days,’ said the one who spoke English. ‘We thought you would be after shooting us if we came in, but now it doesn’t matter, for it is shot we would wish to be—we are in such agony.’

“The doctor, he looked at me and shook his head. ‘’Tis waste of time,’ he whispered. ‘I cannot save them now—’tis too late. I will do what I can, but ’tis useless it will be. Had they come in two or three days ago, ’twould have been easy, for their wounds are but light ones; but the gangrene has set in terribly, and ’tis dead by the night they will all be.’

“And they were, every man jack of the five. And had they not been stuffed with them yarns, and had given themselves up sooner, ’tis saved they would all have been.

“But take our own lads when they take it in the neck, sir.” Cassidy absent-mindedly stretched out his hand for my cigarette case. “’Tis as easy as falling off a log. Take myself in the manner of speaking. As you know, ’twas in the foot I stopped one of their bullets one night, when we were putting up a bit of wire for the boys.

“‘’Tis hit I am,’ I says to Mr. Tracey, I says. ‘’Tis in the foot I have took it; and what will I do, for I doubt if I can walk with ease?’

“So he told off a couple of the lads, and they helped me back to the advanced dressing station. A dug-out it was, about a quarter of a mile behind the firing line.

“ ‘Tis in the foot I have it taken,’ I said to the doctor-man who was there.

“He dressed it for me, and ’twas hurting a bit that it was, and I laid down and waited a while; for the dug-out being a bit concealed like, ’twas easy in that particular place for a motor ambulance to come there. Sure enough, about an hour after, a motor ambulance arrived. I do not know if you have seen the things, sir, but they are made to carry four lying at full length on the stretchers. Two stretchers are hooked to the roof above the others, like the berths in a ship. Off we went, and there were four of us inside, bound for one of the clearing hospitals, which same are up close to the firing line—as close as possible without being under shell fire; though some of them are, and it is shelled they sometimes are.

“We jolted and swayed and cursed, for the roads are terrible round those parts; and though the driver is as careful as he can be, there are, like as not, others to be brought in, and it is not all night he can be over one trip. He has to go back for more. My foot was throbbing to beat the band; but I mind me there was a poor devil with a shattered shoulder beneath me whose moaning was terrible. Still, ’twas over at last, and we reached the hospital. The stretchers were taken out and we were carried up to bed. ’Twas morning when we arrived, and ’twas great to see the sight of a bed again—bedad! ’twas great—with sheets and the like. A great big room it was, all divided up into sort of cubicles like. ’Twas there I spent the

whole of the day, and officers and men were brought in during the day, and others went out to be taken down to the base in the hospital trains. 'Twas in a good place I was in that hospital, I mind me, for towards evening my foot was a little easier, and 'twas talking about the food and the drink for the patients that the sister was to the orderly. 'Twas close by where I was lying, and I heard it all.

“‘Tis a little bit of chicken for the Captain yonder,’ she says, ‘and it’s a whisky-and-soda he may have. As for the Colonel—the spirit is not good for him, but a small bottle of the champagne will not be after hurting him at all.’

“‘Tis well,’ said the orderly. ‘And what of the other new patient—Michael Cassidy?’

“‘Ah!’ says she, ‘with a wound in his foot. ’Tis hot milk he may have.’

“But ’twas not more I waited to hear, for I let out a roar of ‘Help,’ so that the orderly came running to find out the trouble.

“‘Away with you,’ I says, ‘for I am not well, and your face is not either. ’Tis the sister I would see.’

“‘What is it, Cassidy?’ she says, coming up.

“‘Sister darling,’ says I, ‘’twas hearing you that I was. ’Tis whisky for the Captain, and champagne for the Colonel, and for Michael Cassidy ’tis hot milk. You would not be so cruel, for ’tis heating to the blood I have always found the milk.’

“‘Tis something you shall have inside it,’ says she, laughing.

“ ‘Tis well,’ I says, ‘but as you love me, sister, make not the milk part too strong.’

“ ‘Orderly,’ she says, ‘beat up two eggs in Cassidy’s milk,’ and with that she was away. ’Twas terrible, but maybe she was right, for a little later my foot started throbbing bad.

“ ’Tis a strange thing the noises in a hospital at night, sir. There were fifty or sixty of us in that ward, and ’twas screened from one another we were by wooden partitions, as I have been telling you. Next door to me was a lad muttering to himself, and ’twas rot he was talking of his best girl and the Kaiser all jumbled up together. Low groans were coming from different parts of the room, and ’twas a terrible air of restlessness brooded over the place. Away down the other end an officer was coughing as if he would tear himself to pieces, and once very loud and sharp a voice rang out ‘Steady, boys.’ And up and down went the sister, with a glass of milk for one maybe, and a cool hand on a lad’s hot forehead, and a soothing word for all of us. ’Tis angels they are.

“And then—’twas only to be expected like—I got a bit light-headed myself, but not bad, for ’twas into a sort of uneasy doze that I fell: dreaming vividly I was—fever dreams—you mind the sort, sir. ’Twas a great dream, for ’twas back in Ballygoyle that I was, and ’twas a grand morning in November. For the hounds were drawing the gorse, and the greatest dog fox you have ever seen was away like a streak—with the beauties streaming after him. I heard their music

—and 'twas giving tongue I was myself—for 'twas four miles without a check as he was going. 'Hark-to-'em, the beauties!' I cries. 'Forrard on, my darlings!' and as I was coming to the first bank myself, 'twas a big one too, I woke up, and the sister was there.

"'Hush, Cassidy,' she says, 'tis disturbing the others that you are.'

"'But 'twas hounds I heard in full cry,' I says, 'and we were in Ballygoyle.'

"' 'Twas not hounds,' she says, putting her hand on my forehead; ' 'twas the Colonel, who had just got to sleep, and it's woken him you have.'

"As she was speaking he started again. Bedad! sir, I have never heard his equal. 'Twas like the music of fifteen packs of hounds, broken by periodical explosions like land mines going off.

"' 'Tis great,' I says, as he woke up again with a terrible loud explosion that shook the room. ' 'Tis my grandfather he has beaten entirely, and 'twas him you could hear in the next street.'

"'Twas the next morning they took me away again, for you will mind that at the clearing hospitals up at the front 'tis rare that they keep one for more than a night. 'Tis never knowing that they are whether there will not be an attack or the like, and a lot of the lads suddenly to make room for, so they have you out at once. Carried downstairs in a stretcher I was to one of those motor ambulances again, and away we went to the station.

"And while I think of it, sir, 'twas a fine story I heard the other day, and 'tis talking of clearing hospitals that made me think of it. The very same night I was in one myself, those Germans put a few shells into another of them in another part of the line. 'Twas but little damage they did, saving only to burst one of those little high-explosive shells close by one of the motor cyclists as he was passing by outside. Nigh blown to bits he was, but there was still life in him.

"'A doctor,' cried the lads who came running up, 'for 'tis hurt he is.'

" "'Tis no doctor I want at all,' he gasps, ' 'tis an officer. Get an officer—a staff officer if possible, but anyway an officer. 'Tis not a doctor will be doing me any good'—for the lad knew 'twas all over.

"They ran and fetched an officer, and when he came, the motor cyclist clutched his arm and whispered. 'You have it, sir?' he says when he had finished, 'for 'tis important. Repeat it to me.' And the officer repeated it.

" "'Tis well,' he said, 'and 'tis not failed I have,' as the doctor arrived. ' 'Tis no good, doc.,' he says, ' 'tis all up; but I have the message delivered.' And then he turned over and muttered. ' 'Tis all right, dear,' he whispers, and he choked a bit, and 'twas all over. 'Twas a 'Varsity lad, they told me, and a man that he was.

"But as I was telling you, sir," he went on after a moment, "they took me to the hospital train, and

'twas comfortable it was too. 'Tis nice things to eat and drink you can get on board, and 'twas a nice lady was in charge of the carriage where I was. Kind she was, and with her a gentleman of the Red Cross. 'Twas between six and seven hours we were before we reached the base, where we were again taken by them motor ambulances to a big stationary hospital. 'Twas there I met the sweetest little hospital nurse I have ever seen. Begorra! sir, she was——”

But at this moment I felt an interruption was necessary. “Quite so, Cassidy; so they all are, and I trust Mrs. Cassidy shares your opinion,” I remarked, with the vain idea of stemming this flood-tide of reminiscence.

“A sweet little fringe she had,” he went on dreamily, “and the neatest little ankle you have seen outside of——”

But personally I was outside of the door.



CHAPTER X

GOOD-BYE AND GOOD LUCK

IT was with quite a heavy heart that I found myself ascending the steps of the house where my disreputable old friend temporarily dwelt, for it was for the last time; and in this war all good-byes tend to have a feeling of solemnity about them. I found him in front of the open window making violent signals to a parlourmaid in the house opposite; but as she hastily vanished when she saw me, I did not draw undue attention to his behaviour.

“’Tis yourself, sir,” he said, “and it’s glad to see you that I am. ’Tis reading I’ve just been of some French lads who went out one night to the German trenches to cut the wire. Twenty of them there were under a sergeant, and they got right up without being seen. ’Twas cutting they were, when one of them cut the alarm wire, and ’twas all up. They put the search-lights on, and there they were—absolutely in the soup. In a second they were all killed or wounded, and ’twas lucky for those that were killed, for their end was quick and merciful. But the poor devils who were wounded! Does it not bring a lump to one’s throat, sir, to think of them?—for those

German swine would neither allow the French to come out and rescue them, nor would they be bothered with the taking of them prisoners themselves.

"For two days and nights they lay there, moaning feebly and trying to bind one another's wounds; and 'twas not killing them even the Germans would be, to end their misery, though they were close to their trenches. They liked to gloat over them, as they died in agony. At last 'twas only the sergeant who was left, and 'twas not far from rest and peace that he was at all. He could hardly move, his limbs were just twitching feebly, when suddenly—'twas just before the end, I suppose—he gathered all his strength together, and his voice rang out through the night. 'Twas the Marseillaisé he sang, and as they heard it a great roar of cheers came from the French, and they all took it up with him. 'Twas a great depth for a man to die—to go out to such a tune, like that, with the Germans to hear, and to know that, though death was on you, yet you were a better man than those who had let you die."

"It must be an awful thing to see fellows you know lying wounded in front of you, and not be able to get at them," I said as he paused.

"It is, sir, it is. Sometimes in the morning one will see a great mass of men lying out in front, and some are dead and some are dying, and some are only wounded badly. 'Tis terrible the moaning, and sometimes a man in his agony will give a great heave and a scream and half rise out of a twitching mass

of bodies, and then sink back again, exhausted and a little nearer death. And on each side they watch them like a cat watches a mouse. 'Tis not a nice affair—but 'tis no good pretending that this war is anything but hideous. 'Tis perhaps no one's fault—the difficulty of getting in those wounded—because it stands to reason one cannot have them wandering about between the trenches, seeing where sap-heads are, maybe, and getting an idea of the other fellow's trenches and the number of men that he has.

“But there is one story, sir, that is almost the finest I have ever heard. Maybe you have heard it yourself—but it does not matter, for 'tis a story that bears the telling twice. There were wounded of both sides—us and them—between the trenches, and gradually they had all been brought in. Mistakes had occurred, 'tis true. Each side had plugged the others as they got out to pull them in, but people are jumpy up there, and guns go off quickly—and anyway both sides were equally to blame. They had them all in—all, that is, save one, and he was a German; wounded badly he was, and about half way between the two trenches. One of their lads getting out to bring him in was shot as dead as a doornail by a lad who was a bit jumpy, and then another one did the same thing. 'Twas bad, but those things will happen. Then suddenly one of our own officers—furious he was with our lads for shooting—he jumps up on the parapet and goes out. The Germans promptly plugged him—but they did not kill him—and he went on steadily straight

to the wounded German. Both sides was watching, for they could not understand what was occurring. He reached the Boche and picks him up, and then he staggers on to the German trenches. And then they understood. 'Twas half out of the trenches both sides was in their excitement, roaring and cheering. He reached the Germans and handed him over to his own lads. Then he saluted; but 'twas not finished yet, for a German officer sprang out, and taking off his own Iron Cross, pinned it on the English officer. The Germans roared and cheered as he saluted again and turned back. 'Twas in the middle half-way back that he lurched forward and fell, only to get up again and stagger on a few paces. Then he fell again, and did not rise, and some of our lads went out to bring him in. 'Twas dead that he was, and when they found it out they took off their hats for a moment, and stood still in the middle between the trenches. And the German officer and some men got up on the parapet to be after showing their respect for a brave man, while they carried him in.

"'Tis perhaps those little touches of human nature," he went on after a pause, "that save us all from going mad up there. 'Tis terrible the strain, sir. I mind that after that terrible fighting in November, when they came out of the trenches, 'twas impossible to speak to some of the lads without their bursting out crying. 'Twas their nerves had all gone, and 'tis not I that would be surprised at it. But 'tis a terrible thing to see a great strong man suddenly start to

sob like a little child, because you're after asking him the time. 'Tis almost funny it sounds, but 'tis to me the most terrible thing of all—more terrible far than death to look on.

“'Twas those great shells did it a lot. The concussion if they burst near you was so terrible. It left you dazed like, and 'twas unable to control your hands or your legs at all that you were—trembling all over, and talking gibberish as like as not; and when you see a man like that, 'tis not a sight you will be forgetting.

“I mind me once we were drawn up along a road. All the wagons and carts were there one behind the other, and 'twas myself that was in charge of them for the time being. Suddenly I saw an officer coming down the road; walking fast he was, first on one side and then on the other.

“‘'Tis a strange appearance he has,’ says I to myself, ‘and 'tis in a hurry he seems to be.’ With that he reaches the drivers of the first wagon, and asks them something. Terrible excited he was, almost running from one to the other; and very angry he seemed to be when they were unable to tell him. He goes on to the next wagon and does the same performance all over again; and when I sees the two first ones talking together and looking at him, I says to myself, I says, ‘There’s something queer, there is,’ I says. ‘'Tis myself that will be finding out what is the matter at all.’

“So up I goes, and I says to him, ‘Can I do anything

for you, sir?' I says, 'or what is it at all you would be wanting?'

" ' 'Tis a sergeant you are,' he says. 'The saints be praised, for 'tis no sense at all I can get from them damn fools,' and he points to the drivers. 'Have you seen my men?' he goes on, 'for 'tis somewhere about here they should be.'

" 'What regiment, sir?' I says, for he was from the trenches, and covered with mud, and 'twas hard to see his badges.

" 'The Pimlico Peashooters,' he says, glaring at me. 'Don't stand there gaping at me like a stuck pig, you fool, or 'tis missing the train we'll be. 'Tis Margate I have promised to take them to for a bathe, and to eat winkles with a pin.'

"And then one of the men near by started to laugh. 'Shoot that man!' he cries, and draws his revolver. Sure if I had not been quick, he would have done it, and it took three of us to get him quiet again. Then mercifully the doctor-man came up, and all was well. Mad he was, sir, absolutely mad. He thought he'd walked from Berlin, and he didn't even know there was a war on. Poor gentleman, 'tis hoping I am that he is all right again now—but I heard afterwards what had happened. 'Twas blown up the trench had been in which he was, and he was the only one who had escaped. Every man with him, all the other officers, had been blown to pieces, and he had been hurled about twenty yards by the explosion. Stunned he was, of course, and when he recovered

his reason had gone. 'Twas a terrible sight to see."

Sergeant Cassidy paused, and a far-away look came over his face. "It's thinking I am, sir," he said, after a pause, "though 'tis not much in my line to say these things—'tis thinking I am that I would not change places with Kaiser Bill. 'Tis not the dead that will be troubling him at all—not them that are killed clean. But when the end comes, and he goes to join his fathers, will he be liking the burden he has to bear? Will he hear then the groaning curses of men writhing in their death-grip on the plains of Flanders? Will he see then the lads turning their glazing eyes to the Fatherland before they go out into the darkness? Will he live then through the hours when men, turning this way and that, scream to their officers to kill them and put them out of their misery and agony? What will that man feel, I am asking you, sir?"

"Will he see the women and the children watching through tearless staring eyes for steps they will never hear again? Will he hear those names—softly muttered through lips already half choked with the life-blood of the speakers—will he hear them, I says, and will they haunt him throughout eternity? I do not know, but I would not be him. 'Tis a sergeant I am, a poor Irishman from Ballygoyle, but as there is a God above, it's frightened I would be to have to face eternity with his little load. 'Twas he who started it—he or his son. I know not which, and faith! 'tis of little matter. But when the time comes and 'tis his

time to cross the border, his time to go down the last long Vale, 'tis not alone he will be. Wailing beside him will be the bitter fearful curses of homes he has wrecked, of women, of children, of men writhing in their death-grip. Women left destitute, their men rigid, grinning, with eyes that do not see—children fatherless, mourning for men who went to their death singing the 'Watch on the Rhine.' Drugged they were, and puppets—playthings of the great War Lord. Those curses, sir, will ring in his ears through eternity, till maybe a merciful God will give him oblivion and wipe him out."

"You are right, Cassidy," I said quietly. "God knows the extent of his sin—God will decide the extent of his punishment; but, as you say, I would not be him."

For a space we were silent, and in one's imagination one seemed to hear the zip of the maxims, the drone of the shells carrying on even then the work of death. But such thoughts are not good for soldiers. We are there to fight, not philosophise; to act, not to think.

"I am going in three days, Cassidy," I said, as I got up. "Over yonder—with the new lads. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, sir," he said, getting up, though I tried to prevent him. "We have been together before now, and we know one another. 'Tis good they will be, I know—but 'tis good they must be if they would live

up to the reputation we have given them. 'Tis but remnants we have left of our original army, but there has never been anything in this world to beat it—and there never will be again. Good-bye, sir. Good luck.”



CHAPTER XI

THE LIEUTENANT

GERALD AINSWORTH was the only son of his parents—and they made something in tins. He had lots of money, as the sons of people who dabble in tins frequently do. He was a prominent member of several dull night-clubs, where he was in the habit of seeing life while other people saw his money. He did nothing and was generally rather bored with the process. In fact, he was a typical product of the twentieth century—with his father's house in the country full of footmen and ancestors, both types guaranteed by the best references—and his own rooms in London full of clothes and photographs. He was a very fair sample of that dread disease, "the Nut," and it was not altogether his own fault. Given an income that enabled him to do what he liked, certain that he would never be called on to work for his living, he had degenerated into a drifter through the pleasant paths of life—a man who had never done one single thing of the very slightest use to himself or anybody else. Then came the war, and our hero, who was not by any means a bad fellow at heart, obtained

a commission. It was a bit of an event in the family of Ainsworth—*née* Blobbs—and the soldier-ancestor of Charles I.'s reign smiled approval from the walls of the family dining-room: as I have said, it was guaranteed to behave as all well-brought-up ancestors are reputed to do.

Gerald was becomingly modest about it all, and, to do him credit, did not suffer from uniformitis as badly as some I wot of. It is possible that a small episode which occurred in the drawing-room of the baronial hall had something to do with it—for, I will repeat, he was not a bad fellow at heart. And this was the episode.

Coming in one Saturday afternoon on week-end leave in the full glory of his new uniform, he found the room full of girls—his income would in time be over five figures, his return for the week-end had not been kept secret, and there may or may not be a connection. Also there were his mother and father and one very bored man of about thirty in plain clothes.

"This is my son, Gerald," cooed the old lady. "So splendid of him, you know, joining the Army. This dreadful war, you know. More tea, my dear. Poor things, out there—how I pity them. Quite terrible. But don't you think it's splendid, the way they're all joining?"

The bored man in mufti looked more bored. "Why?" he asked resignedly.

"Why!" echoed a creation on his right indignantly. "How can you ask such a thing? Think of all the hardship and suffering they'll have to endure. Isn't that enough?" and she glanced tenderly at Gerald, while six other creations bit savagely at muffins because she'd got it out first.

"I don't quite follow the argument," answered the bored man patiently. "If a man has no ties, I don't see that there is any credit in his joining the Army. It is his plain duty, and the gravest discredit attaches to him if he doesn't. Don't you agree with me?" and he turned to Gerald.

"Certainly," answered Gerald, with the faintest hesitation. The line of argument was a little new.

"And what regiment are *you* going to join?" remarked another creation, with dangerous sweetness.

The bored man smiled slightly. "The one I've been in for ten years. I've just come back from Central Africa and cross the day after to-morrow."

As I have said, it is possible that this small incident tended to make the disease of uniformitis a mild one in our hero's case, and to bring home to him exactly what the pukka soldier does think of it all.

Time went on as time will do, and over his doings in the winter I will not linger. Bar the fact that he'd been worked till he was just about as fit as a man can be, I really know nothing about them. My story is of his coming to France and what happened to him while he was there till, stopping one in the shoulder, he went back to England feet first—a man, where be-



fore he had been an ass. He was only in France a fortnight, from the time he landed at Havre till the time they put him on a hospital ship at Boulogne; but in that fortnight he lived and, not to put too fine a point on it, deuced nearly died as well; so he got his money's worth.

And now, for I have lingered too much on the introduction of my hero, I will get to business.

The train crept on through the night—now pulling up with a series of nerve-shattering jolts, then on again at its apparently maximum speed of twenty miles an hour. In the corner of a so-called first-class carriage Gerald Ainsworth stared into the darkness with unseeing eyes. The dim shapes that flashed past him seemed like the phantasmagoria of a dream. For the first time for three days he had the time to think. He recalled the lunch in Southampton when he had said good-bye to various people who seemed to have a slight difficulty in speaking. He remembered dining in the hotel whose sacred portals are barred to the civilian, still in ignorance of where he was going—to France, the Dardanelles, or even farther afield. Then all the bustle of embarking the regiment and, later, disembarking. And now he was actually under way, starting on the Great Adventure. There were others in the carriage with him, but only one was asleep and he did not belong to the regiment. To him the Adventure had ceased to be great; it was old and stale,

and he had spent most of his time cursing at not being able to raise a motor-car. For when you know the ropes—be it whispered—it is generally your own fault if you travel by supply train. But of that the man who sat staring out of the window knew nothing. All he knew was that every minute carried him nearer the unknown—the unknown of which he had read so much and knew so little.

His equipment was very new and beautiful—and very bulky. Prominent among it was that abomination of desolation the fitted mess-tin. Inside it reposed little receptacles for salt and pepper and plates and dinner napkins and spirit lamps that explode like bombs. Aunts are aunts, and there was none to tell him that the roads of Flanders are paved with fitted mess-tins. His revolver was loaded—in fact, five of those dangerous weapons reposed in the racks. The gentleman who slept was armed only with a walking-stick. . . .

Gerald Ainsworth muttered impatiently under his breath as the train stopped for the twelfth time in an hour.

“Putrid journey, isn’t it?” said the man opposite him, and he grunted in acquiescence.

Somehow he did not feel very much like talking. He recalled that little episode in the drawing-room of months ago; he recalled the man in mufti’s cool, quiet face—his calm assumption that there was no credit in coming to fight, but merely disgrace if you did not. He realised that he and his like were on trial,

and that the judge and jury were those same quiet-faced men who for centuries—from father to son—have carried the name of England into the four corners of the world, without hope of reward—just because it was their job; those men who for years have realised that the old country was slipping, sliding down from the place that is hers by right of blood; those men who were hanging on, waiting for him and his like to come and do their bit. He realised that the trial for which he had trained so hard was approaching; that every minute carried him nearer the final test, from which he might or might not come alive.

And how many of those others—his judges—lay quiet and still in unmarked graves? . . .

In the dim light he looked critically at his hand. It was perfectly steady; shamefacedly—unseen—he felt his pulse, it was normal: he was not afraid, that he knew—and yet, somehow, in the pit of his stomach there was a curious sort of feeling. He recalled the first time he had batted at school before a large crowd: he recalled the time when, lying on an operating table, he had seen the doctor fiddling with his instruments: he recalled those horrible ancient newspapers in the waiting-room at his dentist's: and grimly he realised that the feeling was much the same. It was fear of the unknown, he told himself savagely; moreover, he was right. Yet he envied fiercely, furiously, the man sleeping in the opposite corner who came to war with a walking-stick. . . . But the man who came to war

with a walking-stick, who slept so easily in his corner, who swore because he could not get a motor-car, had had just that same sinking sensation one night eight or nine months ago.

He recalled the girls whose photographs adorned his rooms in London; he recalled the night-clubs where women, of a type, always kind to him, had been even kinder since he had put on a uniform; he recalled the home his father had bought—the home of a family, finished and done with, wiped out in the market of money, wiped out by something in tins; and somehow the hollowness of the whole thing struck him for the first time. He saw himself for what he really was—the progeny of an uneducated man with a business instinct, and yet the welcome guest of people who would have ignored him utterly had the tins proved bad. And suddenly he found himself face to face with the realities of life—because in that slow-going, bumping train his imagination had shown him the realities of death. So far the only shells he had ever heard had been fired at a practice camp in England; so far he had never seen a man who had died a violent death; but that train, crawling through the still summer night, and his imagination supplied the deficiencies. He was face to face with realities, and the chains of England seemed a bit misty. . . . And yet a week ago they had seemed so real. Can Bernhardt have been right, after all, in some of the things he said? Is war necessary for a nation? Does it show up life

in its true colours—when money ceases to be the only criterion?

Bernhardi may have been right, but, anyway, he is a horrible fellow.

When Gerald Ainsworth woke up the train had grunted to a final halt at a biggish station, and the early morning sun was shining in a cloudless sky.

Ainsworth fell out of the train endeavouring to buckle the various straps that held together his Christmas tree of equipment. In the intervals of getting his platoon sorted out he looked about him with a vague sort of feeling of surprise. Somehow he'd expected things would look different—and behold! everything was just normal. A French sentry with his long-pointed bayonet at the crossing just outside the station seemed the only thing alive besides himself and his men. The man opposite, who had slept so soundly, had disappeared, swearing volubly, to lie in wait for a motor-car. And then happening to look at the colonel he found him in earnest consultation with an officer, who sported a red band on his arm. This extremely crusty individual he subsequently discovered boasted the mystic letters R. T. O. on his band—which for the benefit of the uninitiated may be translated Railway Transport Officer. And though as a rule their duties do not carry them within range of the

festive obus, or shell, yet their crustiness—the few who are crusty—may be forgiven them. For to them come wandering at all hours of the twenty-four men of all sorts, sizes, and descriptions, bleating for information and help. The type of individual who has lost his warrant, his equipment, and his head, and doesn't know where he is bound for, but it is somewhere beginning with a B, is particularly popular with them early in the morning. However, that is all by the way.

They filed out of the station and the battalion sat down beside the road, while the cooks got busy over breakfast. Periodically a Staff officer hacked by on a rustic morning liver-shaker, and a couple of aeroplanes, flying low, passed over their heads bound on an early reconnaissance. They were still many miles from the firing line and, save for a low but insistent muttering, coming sullenly through the still morning air, they might have been in England. In fact, it was a great deal more peaceful than training in England. The inhabitants passing by scarcely turned their heads to look at them—and, save for the inevitable crowd of small children who alternately sucked their dirty thumbs and demanded, "Cigarette, souvenir," no one seemed at all interested in their existence. Everything was very different from the tin-god atmosphere of England.

At last a whistle blew and there was a general tightening of belts and straps. The battalion fell in,

and with its head to the east swung off along the dusty road towards the distant muttering guns. As a route march it was much like other route marches—except that they were actually in Flandérs. The country was flat and uninteresting. The roads were *pavé* and very unpleasant to march on. Ainsworth's pack felt confoundedly heavy, and the top had come off the pepper receptacle in the fitted mess-tin. They passed some Indians squatting in a field by the roadside, and occasionally a party of cavalry horses out on exercise—for the cavalry were up in the trenches, and when they're up there they leave the horses behind. Also gilded beings in motor-cars went past periodically, to the accompaniment of curses and much dust. The battalion was singing as it swung along, and in front a band of a sort gave forth martial music—the principal result of which was to bring those auditors not connected with the regiment cursing from their bivouacs at the unseemly noise.

And then miles away in the distance they saw a line of little white puffs up in the blue of the sky—a new one appearing every second. It was Archibald—or the anti-aircraft gun—"doing the dirty," that fruitful source of stiff necks to those who see him for the first time.

But I will not dwell on that route march. It was, as I have said, much like others, only more so. That evening a very hot, tired, and dusty battalion came to rest in some wooden huts beside the road—their home

for the next two or three days. The guns were much louder now, though everything else was still very quiet. Away about four or five miles in front of them a great pall of smoke hung lazily in the air—marking the funeral pyre of ill-fated “Wipers.” For that was their destination in the near future, as Ainsworth had already found out from the adjutant.

Opposite them, on the other side of the road, a cavalry regiment just out of the trenches was resting. Everything seemed perfectly normal—no one seemed to feel the slightest excitement at being within half a dozen miles of the firing line. The officers over the way were ragging—much as they did at home. After a cursory glance at his battalion, to size it up, none of them had paid the slightest attention to them. The arrival of some new men was too common a sight for anyone to get excited about—but Ainsworth could not be expected to know that.

He had strolled out just before dinner, and as he reached a bend in the road the evening frightfulness in Ypres started. For ten minutes or a quarter of an hour a furious shelling went on, gradually dying away to comparative quiet again.

“Is anything happening?” he asked of a passing cavalry subaltern.

“Not that I know of,” returned the other in some surprise.

“But they’re shelling very hard, aren’t they?”

“That! That’s nothing—they do that most nights. Are you just out? Where are you going?”

"Wipers, I think. What's it like?"

"Damnable," rejoined the other tersely, and with that the conversation languished.

For all that, when Gerald pulled the blankets up to his chin that night the feeling in the pit of his stomach had gone. He felt that he'd started to bat—that he was actually in the dentist's chair.

Three days of complete quiet passed—three days that seemed to give the lie to his laconic cavalry acquaintance. Occasionally a burst of shelling proclaimed that neither side was actually asleep, and at night, towards the south, the green German flares could be seen like brilliant stars in the sky. In the main, however, peace was the order of the day. Those who knew were not deceived, however, for there were many lulls before the storm in the second battle of Ypres—that long-drawn-out struggle round the salient. But to the battalion—just arrived—the whole thing seemed rather disappointing. They were tired of Archies and aeroplanes: they were tired of the red glow they could see through the trees at night—where Ypres lay burning; above all, they were tired of getting smothered with dust from passing motor-lorries and ambulances which crashed up and down the road at all hours of the day and night. Like everyone when they first arrived, they wanted to be up and at it. The men had all been issued with respirators, and nightly did breathing exercises—in through the mouth and out through the nose—to the

accompaniment of facetious remarks from the on-lookers. They had not dabbled in Hun gas as yet, nor appreciated its delights, so the parade was not a popular one. Comments on "'Im with the Iron Mask," and requests of a personal nature to your friends always to wear a pad owing to their improved appearance, enlivened what otherwise would have been a somewhat boring performance. A week later—but I will not anticipate.

Ainsworth himself, to pass the time, had tried a little bomb-throwing with his platoon. This also had not been an unqualified success. As far as the jam tins and hand grenades were concerned, everything in the garden was lovely. Quite a number went off, and all would have been well had not the tempter tempted. Reposing on the ground—brought up by an imbecile sergeant—lay a rifle grenade, that infernal invention which, on leaving the rifle, puts a boomerang to shame and generally winds up in the commanding officer's dug-out, there exploding with great force. However, as I have remarked before, Ainsworth could not be expected to know that. Knowledge on the avoidance of supply trains, and boredom, and the deviltry that lies latent in a rifle grenade comes only with many weary weeks. So he fired it. Away it went, soaring into space, and at length a great explosion announced that all was over.

"It seemed to go some way, sir," said the sergeant.

"It did," answered Ainsworth, "farther than I

thought." His face expressed a little uneasiness, when suddenly an apparition appeared. Hopping over a ploughed field towards him, brandishing his arms, came an infuriated figure in carpet slippers. The platoon paused in silent dismay, while a bull-like bellow came floating through the air.

"You blithering ass," roared an excited voice, as a purple-faced gunner-major came to a standstill in front of him. "You fat-headed, splay-footed idiot. I have been shelled and gassed and shot at for two months without a pause by the Germans, and when I come back here to rest you plaster my picket line with lumps of steel, and burst lyddite bombs on my bed!"

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Ainsworth. "I'd no idea——"

"Then, damn it, go away and get one. Go away and make noises and explosions in your own bed, or apply to go to the Dardanelles, or something. You're a menace, sir, a pest, and you ought to be locked up."

So that, all things being considered, it came as a distinct relief to our somewhat ruffed and misunderstood hero when, on returning to lunch, he found the battalion was going up into the reserve trenches that night.

And so it came to pass that at six o'clock that evening Gerald Ainsworth, with a few other officers

of his battalion, jogged slowly along in a bone-shaking wagon toward Ypres. He was going up early to take over the trenches from the battalion they were relieving, which in turn was going up to the front line. Past the station with its twisted rails and splintered sleepers, past the water-tower, almost untouched at that time amid the general devastation, on down the road, and then right-handed into the square. Some blackened half-burned carcasses lying under the ruins of the Cloth Hall—the first actual trace of war he had seen—held him fascinated. Down a side street a house was burning fiercely, but of life there was none, except one military policeman watching for looters. A very young subaltern on the box-seat was being entertained by the A.S.C. driver—one of the good old sort. Six officers fresh from home—thirsting for blood—should they not have it? Every shell-hole held a story, and the driver was an artist. “You can take it from me, sir, and I knows. This ’ere place weren’t no blooming picnic three weeks ago. The major, he says to me, ‘Jones,’ he says, ‘the ration limbers have gone off and have forgotten the tea. I looks to you to get the tea to them lads in the trenches. Also, there’s an allowance of pepper been sent out in a parcel by the League of Beauty in Tooting for our gallant defenders in France—put that in too.’

“‘Very good, sir,’ I says. ‘They shall have their tea and their pepper, or my name’s not Alf Jones.’

“‘With that, sir, I harnesses up the old horses and I gallops. Through ’ere I comes, the old horses going

like two-year-olds. And then they was shelling it, no blooming error. As I was going through, the cathedral fell down and one of the tiles hit me on the napper. But what did I care? Just as I gets here I meets a party of officers—three generals and their Staff blokes. Says they to me, they says, ‘Stop, for the generals are gassed and you must take us away.’

“I says to ’em, I says, ‘And what about the pepper, gentlemen, for the men in the trenches?’

“‘Pepper!’ cries a Staff officer, and as he spoke we took it, sir. Right into the back of the wagon they put a seventeen-inch shell, and the gift from the League of Beauty was all over the square. Sneeze!—you should have ’eard us. The Commander-in-Chief—’e sneezed the gas right out of ’im, and the Linseed Lancer ’e says to me, ’e says, ‘Jones, you’ve saved our lives.’

“‘Yus,’ I says, ‘you’re welcome to any little thing like that; but what about them poor trusting girls and their pepper?’”

It was at this moment, I subsequently gathered, that my subaltern hove in sight carrying two large mirrors under his arm and, finding where they were going, demanded a lift.

“Very quiet to-night,” he remarked, when he was stowed inside. “I’ve just been looting mirrors for periscopes.”

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Now, I’ve brought him into the story, because he

was the first man to tell them that the reserve trenches they were occupying were not all honey and strawberry jam. He's a useless young blighter, and unless he's watched very carefully he always drinks more than his fair share of port. But, in view of the fact that other people will arrive in time and go and sit—if not in those particular trenches, at any rate in trenches like them—I would like to point out that the man on the spot knows what he's talking about. Also that, because for three days on end you do a thing with perfect safety, it does not follow that you won't be killed doing it the fourth. And I would like it to be clearly established that my port-drinking looter of mirrors told the officers in the wagon that the line they were going into was habitually shelled. Remember, everything was quiet. Those who may happen to read these words and who know Ypres will bear me witness as to how quiet it can be, and will agree with me that it can frequently be—otherwise.

Now, they dropped him half way, at a place where there are cellars in which a man may live in safety, and there they disembarked from the wagon and walked: and all was peace. One dead horse—a very dead horse—raised its voice to heaven in mute protest; but otherwise all was perfectly peaceful. Two or three shells passed overhead as they walked down the road, but these were quite obviously harmless. And suddenly one of our own batteries let drive from close by with a deafening bang. Nothing untoward

occurred, and yet they were quite near enough to hear individual rifle shots.

And so they came to the trenches which they were to occupy, and found them full of a regiment which had been in them for two days and was going up to the front line that night. The right flank rested on a railway line and the left on no special mark in particular. Away in front of them on the left a dull brownish smudge could be seen on the ground—in a place where the country was open. The German trenches! Who does not remember the feelings with which he first contemplated the German front trench and realised that there actually reposed the Huns? And, in passing, it's a strange fact, but nevertheless a true one, that quite a number of men have been out to the trenches, survived two or three days, been wounded, and gone home without so much as seeing a Boche.

That night the battalion made their first acquaintance with trenches as a bed. Luckily they were dry, as trenches go, though they suffered, in common with all other trenches, from an eruption of small pools of water occurring exactly where you wanted to put your head. And now the time has come for me to justify my subaltern's existence and entry into this story. As I said before, he had warned that party of officers that the trench was not healthy at all times, but his voice was as the voice of Tishbite, or Job, or whoever it was who cried in vain. For the next morn-

ing—a beautiful warm morning—the men woke up a bit cramped and stiff, and getting up to stretch themselves found that everything was still quiet and peaceful. And one by one they got out of the trenches and strolled about discussing life in general and breakfast in particular. Also several of the officers did the same. It came without warning—like a bolt from the blue. A screaming sort of whizz—and then bang, bang, bang all along the line: for the range was known by the Germans to twenty yards. The officer Gerald was talking to gave a funny little throaty cough and collapsed like a pricked bladder. And he lay very still with his eyes staring—a sentence cut short on his lips—with a crimson stream spreading slowly from his head. For a moment Gerald stood dazed, and then with a gasp fell into the trench, pulling the officer after him. Crump, crump came two high-explosive shells—plump on the parapet—burying about ten men in the débris. And for a space the battalion ceased to discuss things in general and breakfast in particular.

Four hours later they were still sitting remarkably tight in the trenches. Airings on the ground had ceased to be popular—for behind the trench lay a dozen still forms with covered faces. Suddenly there came a voice from above Gerald, enquiring, to the accompaniment of much unparliamentary language, who was in charge of that bit of trench. Looking up, he encountered the fierce gaze of a Staff officer and with him a crusty-looking sapper captain.

"I say, look out!" he cried, getting up. "It's awful up there. We lost about thirty men this morning."

"So I see," answered the Staff officer. "What the deuce were they doing up here? Are you aware that this is under direct observation from the Germans? Some of you fellows seem to think that because things are quiet for five minutes you can dance pastoral dances in front of your trenches." He grunted dispassionately.

The sapper captain took up the ball.

"What do you propose to do where the parapet has collapsed?" he enquired.

"I really hadn't thought about it," answered Ainsworth, looking at the collapsed trench. "I haven't had any orders."

"Orders! On matters of that sort you don't receive them; you give them. On the road are hundreds of sandbags, thousands of sandbags, millions of——" The Staff officer caught his eye. Daily they quarrelled over sandbags. "At any rate," he went on firmly, "there are lots of sandbags. Go and get them. Fill them. Build up the bally trench, and don't leave it like that for the next poor blighters. Work on trenches is never finished. You can go on for days and weeks and months——" But the Staff officer was leading him away. "Years, I tell you, can you work on these d—— trenches: and he waits for orders!"

"Peter, you're feverish." The Staff officer gently drew him on and they suddenly paused. "What," he

cried, in a voice of concentrated fury, gazing at a trench full of faces upturned to the sky, "what are you looking at? Turn your faces down, you fat-headed dolts. I know it's a German aeroplane—I saw it three minutes ago—and there you sit with a row of white faces gazing up at him, so as to leave him in no doubt that the trenches are occupied. Keep down and don't move, and above all don't show him a great line of white blotches. They're bad enough for us to bear as it is, but——"

"James, you're feverish now." It was the sapper officer's turn to draw him away. "But I admit," he remarked sadly as they faded away, "that it's all quite dreadful. They learn in time, but, to begin with, they want nurses."

And, lest the morning perambulation of these two weary officers may seem inconsistent in any way with their words, I would point out that what two or three may do in perfect safety a body of men may not. They don't as a rule waste shells on an isolated man in khaki, and these particular trenches were out of rifle range.

For the time, therefore, we will leave Gerald building up his trench with those twelve silent bodies behind—eloquent testimony that appearances are deceitful and that the man on the spot knows best.

"Is that the guide? What, you're the general's cook! Well, where the devil is the guide? All right, lead

on." The battalion was moving up into the front line trenches, after two uneventful days in reserve. Their lesson well learnt, they had kept under cover, and the only diversion had been the sudden appearance out of heaven of an enormous piece of steel which had descended from the skies with great rapidity and an unpleasant zogging sort of noise. The mystery was unearthed from the parapet where it had embedded itself, and completely defeated everyone; till a stray gunner, passing, told them that it was merely part of a German Archie shell—which had burst up at a great height and literally fallen like manna from the heavens.

"Slow in front—for Heaven's sake." Agitated mutterings from the rear came bursting up to the front of the column, mingled with crashes and stifled oaths as men fell into shell-holes they couldn't see, probably half-full of water.

"Keep still—duck." An insistent order muttered from every officer as a great green flare shot up into the night and, falling on the ground near them, burnt fiercely and then went out, leaving everything blacker than ever. On their left a working party furiously deepened a communication trench that already resembled a young river. Coming on their right, as they crept and stumbled along in single file, a small party of men loomed out of the night. More agitated mutterings: "Who are you?" and from a medley of answers, comprising everyone from the Archbishop of

Canterbury to the Kaiser, the fact emerges that they are the ration party of the regiment on their right.

At last a halt. The head of the battalion has reached the trenches and the men begin getting in. Not used to the game, there is a lot of unnecessary delay before the men are settled and the other regiment away. They have left behind two or three officers to introduce the new men to the trenches, explain exactly what places are healthy and what are not—where the ammunition is kept, and the bombs, and the flares.

“A sniper with a fixed rifle has the other side of this traverse marked,” said one of the officers to Gerald. “He’s up in a tree somewhere—so don’t keep any men on the other side of it. He’s killed a lot of ours. Listen to him.” And from the other side came a ping—thud, as the bullet hit the earth. Merely a rifle set on a certain mark during the day, and loosed off ten or eleven times every hour during the night—hoping to bag something.

“They’re pretty quiet here at present,” he was told, “but I don’t trust ’em a yard. They’re too quiet. Bavarians. If you want to, there’s an officer out in front about fifty yards away with a good helmet on. Thought of going out myself last night—but they were too bally busy with their flares. Still—the helmet’s worth getting. Well, so long, I think I’ve shown you everything. Bye-bye. Oh! while I think of it, they’ve got a bit of this communication trench; about forty yards down, marked. I’d get it deepened.”

And with that he went, and Ainsworth was alone. Stray rifle shots cracking through the night—flares going up with steady persistency. He tested his telephone to Headquarters—it was working. He went along his length of trench—one man watching in each little length, the rest lying down with rifles by their sides. Occasionally the watching man gave them one round to show the Hun he wasn't forgotten; while without intermission the ping—thud from the fixed rifle came into the earth of the traverse. It formed a sort of lullaby to Gerald. The awakening was drastic.

Just as the dawn was faintly streaking the sky, and the men all awake were gripping their rifles in anticipation of any possible attack, the first shells burst along the line. From then on, for what seemed an eternity and was in reality two hours, the shells poured in without cessation. Shrapnel, high explosive, and sometimes a great sausage-shaped fellow, came twisting and hurtling through the air, exploding, with a most deafening roar. That was the *Minenwerfer* (trench howitzer). The fumes from the shells got into their eyes, the parapet collapsed, traverses broke down, men gasping, twisting, buried. And still they came. Men, those who still lived, lay dazed and helpless. Whole sections of the front of the trench were torn away in great craters. In some places men, their reason almost gone, got blindly out of the trench—their one idea to get away from the ghastly living death. But if death was probable in the trench, it

was certain outside. The deadly rain of shrapnel searched them out, and one by one they fell. Some, perhaps, dragged on a space with shattered legs, muttering and moaning till another tearing explosion gave them peace.

“Keep down, keep down!” Ainsworth tried to shout. His lips, trembling with the fearful nerve-shattering inferno, could hardly frame the words. When they came it was only a whisper, but had he shouted through a megaphone none would have heard. The din was too incredible.

And still they came. His eyes were fixed stupidly on a man kneeling down behind a traverse, who was muttering foolishly to himself. He saw his lips moving, he cursed him foolishly, childishly, when, with a roar that seemed to split his whole head open, a high-explosive shell burst on the traverse itself. The man who had been muttering fell forward, was hurled forward, and his head stuck out of the earth which had fallen on him. Gerald laughed. It was deuced funny; he started to howl with mirth, when suddenly the head rolled towards him. But he could not stop laughing.

At last he pulled himself together. So this was what he had read about so often in the papers at home, was it?—“a furious bombardment of our trenches.” Perhaps, though, he reflected, this was not a furious bombardment; perhaps this was only “a slight artillery activity upon our front.” And then

he very nearly started laughing again. It was all so frightfully funny; the actual thing was so utterly different. And so far he had not seen a German. Everything had been so completely peaceful—until that morning—and then, without warning—this. Most amazing of all, he was not touched, and as that realisation first took hold of him so his dulled faculties first grasped the fact that the fire was slackening. It was, and, just like a tropical storm, suddenly it seemed to die away. Shells still passed screaming overhead, but those devastating explosions on the trenches—on his trenches—had ceased. Like the sudden cessation of bad toothache, he could hardly believe it at first. His mind, his brain were still dazed; he seemed to be waking from a nightmare, but only half-awake. How long he lay there no one will ever know, trying to steady his hand, to still the twitching of his muscles; but suddenly he was recalled to his senses by seeing a figure coming crawling round the shattered traverse. It was his captain.

“Thank Heaven, you’ve not stopped one, old boy!” he said. “Good God! You’ve had it bad here.”

Gerald nodded; he could not speak. His captain looked at him and so did the sapper officer who came behind; and, being men of understanding, for a space there was silence.

“Worst bit of the whole line,” said the sapper. “We must hold it where we can to-day and get it patched up to-night.”

"How many men have you got left, Gerald, in your platoon?"

"I don't know," he answered, and his voice sounded strange. He looked to see if the others noticed it, but they made no sign. As a matter of fact, his voice was quavering like an old man's—but, as I have said, they were men of understanding. "I'll go and see."

And so the three crawled on, and in various odd corners they pulled out white-faced men. One in a corner was mad. He was playing a game by himself with another man's boot—a boot that contained its original owner's foot. One man was sobbing quietly, but most of them were just staring dazedly in front of them.

Suddenly Gerald clutched his captain's arm. "Heavens! sir," he croaked, "they can get through here."

"Not by day," answered the sapper. "The ground in front is enfiladed from higher up, and, as a matter of fact, they show no signs of advancing. The bombardment has failed."

"Failed! Failed!" croaked Ainsworth, and he laughed hideously. "Rather—I noticed the failure."

"Nevertheless, old chap, what I say is right. They've failed because they can't advance." He put his hand on Gerald's arm for a moment. "They may try to make a small local advance to-night under cover of dark, but I don't think we'll be troubled till then."

They won't renew the bombardment, from what I know of 'em." And with that he was gone.

And so Gerald gathered together the remnants of his platoon, and there were fifteen all told. He put them where he could and waited for the night, when, with another working party, the trenches could be built up to their proper shape again. And then he went and sat down again and wondered at life. Overhead the shells still screamed on their way. In the distance the dull boom of their explosion still came reverberating through the air.

He was getting fairly skilled now in estimating where they would burst, for a desultory shelling of the trenches was still going on, though not in his section of the line. And it was then that I think the ass period emerged from the chrysalis stage and the man appeared. For as he listened to the rushing noise through the air, saw the great cloud of blackish white smoke, and later heard the roar of the explosion somewhere down the line, it was borne in on him that there were other things in the world besides night clubs, that there were other things besides cocktails and whisky sours and amusing women, and that a new force was at work—the force of Death—which made them all seem very petty. The ancestors seemed a bit petty, the money that came from things in tins seemed a bit petty; he only remembered a head rolling towards him with gaping mouth and staring eyes. It struck him that his might have been the head.

Now, in reading over what I have written concerning the commencement of Gerald Ainsworth's pilgrimage in the smiling fields of Flanders, I feel that I too have merited the rebuke so quietly given him in those words, "They have failed." He had lost his sense of proportion—about which another and a worthier pen than mine has written in connection with this same game of war—and I too have perhaps given those who may read these pages an unfair impression.

That bombardment of which I have told was not an ordinary one, it is true, but at the same time it was not anything very extraordinary. Considered by the men who occupied those trenches, it was the nearest approach to a complete cataclysm of the universe that can be conceived of; considered by the men who sit behind and move the pawns on the board, it was a furious bombardment of one five-hundredth of what they were responsible for. Moreover, it had failed. But it is not to be wondered at that when, some time later, Gerald was attempting to give his father some impression of what that morning had been like that worthy old gentleman should have expressed great surprise and indignation that it was not reported in the papers, and stated with some freedom his opinion on the muzzling of the English Press. And yet, would it not have been making a mountain out of a mole-hill—a great battle out of nothing at all? Yes,

nothing at all; for in this struggle what are fifty, a hundred men—provided the enemy does not get what it wants? Much to the relatives of the fifty, but nothing to the result. Hard, but true. A somewhat bitter fact. However, all this is a digression.

We left Gerald, I think, with the remnants of his platoon scattered along what once were trenches, holding them till under cover of night a fresh working party could come up and rebuild them. The wire in front of him had been destroyed by the shell fire, and nothing but a piece of field, pitted and torn up by explosions, separated him from the Germans fifty yards away. The Germans facing him had established a superiority of rifle fire. Secure in practically undamaged trenches, did a man but show his hat opposite them it was riddled with bullets.

Wherefore, after a couple of the remnants of the platoon had ill-advisedly shown their hats with their heads inside them, and a second later had subsided with a choking grunt and a final kick, the survivors confined their attention to the bottom of the trench, and from it sorted out the bombs and the flares and the reserve ammunition. Also they sorted out other things, which we need not specify, and threw them out behind, where in time perhaps they might be decently buried. And then, having done all they could, they sat down with their backs to the parapet and hoped for the best. It was not till half-past eight that night that the German artillery condescended to notice them again, and then for about ten minutes they put a

desultory fire of shrapnel on to the trenches. Then the range lengthened.

Now Gerald was no fool, and suddenly the words of the sapper captain in the morning rang through his brain. "They may make a small local advance under cover of dark." It was almost dark: they had shelled the trenches—apparently aimlessly—and now were shooting behind on the support trenches. Why? He grovelled in the bottom of the trench and found a Very pistol and flare. Up it shot into the air, and as it did he saw them—the whole line saw them—and the fun started. The mad minute started in earnest all along the trench. The trench that enfiladed the ground in front of him got going with a Maxim, flares flew up into the air from all along the line, falling behind the advancing Germans. For about ten minutes the most glorious pandemonium reigned: everyone was mixed up endways. In places the English had come out of their trenches and were going for them grunting and snarling in the open with bayonets. In places they were fighting in our trenches—in places we were in theirs. The Maxim had ceased for fear of hitting its own men, and without intermission flares went up from both sides. Suddenly, on top of Gerald as he stood blazing away into the dusk, there loomed a Bavarian officer. It was touch and go, and if a sergeant beside him had shot a second later this yarn might have had to close here. As it was, the bullet from the Bavarian officer's revolver found a home in



the earth, and the Bavarian himself fell with a crash to the bottom of the trench.

But it could not go on. In places they were breaking; in places they were broken; but, unfortunately, in one place they had got through. At the extreme left of Gerald's trench, which he had been unable to reach during the day owing to a huge hole blown out of the parapet, the Germans had scrambled in. Elsewhere they had fallen back to their own lines, pursued the whole way by men stabbing and hacking at them, their eyes red with the lust of killing, getting a bit of their own back after the unspeakable hell of the morning. And what but a quarter of an hour previously had been bare, open ground was now covered with motionless bodies, from which, later, a few wounded would drag themselves back to their own people.

It was when comparative quiet again reigned that one of his sergeants came to Gerald and reported the uninvited appearance of the Germans away down on the left. Now the presence of the enemy in your own trench in small parties is, I understand, a thing that has frequently puzzled those who read about it at home. It is, however, a thing of fairly common occurrence, and a small hostile party on the offensive may prove extremely unpleasant. The whole thing becomes a question of bombs and rapidity of action. Also, I will willingly lay two to one on the side that gets off the mark first. A traverse, as everyone knows, is a great lump of the original soil left standing when



the trench is dug, and round which the trench is cut. Its object is to localise the bursts of high-explosive shell. As you cannot see round a corner or through solid earth, it is, therefore, obvious that you cannot see from one bit of fire trench into the next, though you can get there by walking round the traverse. If, however, there is a man sitting waiting for you with a rifle this process is not to be recommended, as he will certainly get in the first shot at a range of about five yards.

Now all that Gerald knew, and, to his credit be it said, he acted with promptitude and without hesitation, and the man who does that in war, as in other things, generally acts with success.

"Bombs!" he cried to the sergeant who had told him. "Bombs of all sorts—plum and apple, hair-brush, any damn thing you can get, and all the men at once!" They scabbled them out of the débris and searched for them in the mud, where they had been buried, and at last the party was ready—ten in all.

"What's the jest?" said the sapper officer, dropping into the trench as they were being mustered.

"Boches lower down. We're bombing them out," answered Gerald.

"Then, for Heaven's sake, see the fuse isn't too long," he replied. "Just over an inch is enough for traverse work, or they'll bung 'em back." (An inch of the fuse used will burn about a second and a half.)

With that the party was off, led by Gerald. And they crept on till, suddenly, the sergeant gripped his arm and muttered: "They're behind the next traverse." And from behind the earth in front came a guttural exclamation in German.

Gerald, gripping a rifle, was quivering with excitement. He stole forward to where the trench bent back behind the traverse, while the two front men came up each with a bomb in his hand to throw, when lighted, over the top. It was at the precise moment that Gerald gave them the signal to light that he met his first German face to face. For, finding all was silent, the enemy had decided to make a little tour of inspection on his own, and just as the two bombs were lit and propelled over the traverse a stout and perspiring Bavarian bumped his head almost on to Gerald's rifle. For a moment Gerald was as surprised as the crouching German, but only for a moment, for the Bavarian's death-grunt, the crack of the rifle, and the roar of the two bombs were almost simultaneous.

"On 'em, boys!" he shouted, jerking out his empty cartridge, and they scrambled round, over the body, into the next bit of trench. Four Germans lay stiff, and two were struggling to get round the next traverse. One did and one did not. The sergeant got him first. Up to the next traverse, and the same process over again; but "Move, move, for Heaven's sake move!" is the motto if you want to keep 'em on the

run. And if a German, wounded, tries to trip you—well, halt, everyone, and send for the doctor and a motor-ambulance for the poor chap—I don't think! For three traverses they went on, and then a voice came from the other side, "We surrender." Oh! Gerald, Gerald, would that one who knew the sweeps had been there with you! After all that's been written, why, oh! why did you not tell them to come to you instead of going to them? Surely you have read of their callous swinishness, and your sergeant's life was in your keeping?

There were three of them when he rounded the traverse, and three shots rang out at the same moment. One hit his sergeant in the head and one hit his sergeant in the heart, and one passed between his own left arm and his body, cutting his coat. It was then he saw red, and so did the men who streamed after him.

"Let's stick 'em, sir," said the men, though the Germans had now thrown down their rifles.

"Nothing of the sort," he snarled. "Which of you said 'We surrender'?" and with the veins in his forehead standing out he glared at the Germans.

"I did," answered one of them, smiling. "We really thought you would not be such fools as to be taken in."

"Extraordinary, wasn't it?" laughed Gerald. Yes, the ass period had quite passed. His laugh caused the smiling German to stop smiling.

"As you avoided our bombs entirely owing to an unwarrantable mistake on my part—which cost me the life"—he swallowed once or twice and his hands clenched—"the life of a valued man, I can only remedy this loss on your part to the best of my ability."

"Ah, well," answered the German, "we shall no doubt meet after the war and laugh over the episode. All is fair in love and——" He shrugged his shoulders. "And now we are your prisoners."

"Quite so," drawled Gerald. "All ready for a first-class ticket to Donington Hall. You shall now have it. Bring, my lads, three hair-brush grenades and put in four inches of fuse. That's about eight seconds, my dear friends," and he smiled on the Germans, who were now grovelling on their knees.

"Gott in Himmel!" screamed the one who had spoken, "you would murder us after we have surrendered?"

Gerald pointed to the dead sergeant lying huddled in the corner. "You had surrendered before you murdered him," he remarked quietly.

And now I come to the last day that our friend was privileged to spend in the lotus land of Ypres. When he returns let us hope we shall have moved on—the place is a good deal too lotussy for most of us, if the heavily scented air is any criterion. He

had had most of the excitements which those who come over to this entertainment can expect to get, and on this last day he got the *bonne bouche*—the cream of the side shows. His battalion had come to the reserve trenches, as I have said, and from there they had gone to an abode of cellars, where the men could wash and rest, for nothing save a direct hit with a seventeen-inch shell could damage them. It was at three o'clock in the morning that Gerald was violently roused from his slumbers by his captain. "Get to the men at once!" he ordered. "Respirators to be put on. They're making the hell of a gas attack. It seems to have missed these cellars, but one never knows. Then go and see what's happening." Upstairs a confused babel of sound was going on, and upstairs Gerald sprinted after he had seen his men. A strange smell hung about in the summer air; the peculiar stench of chlorine, luckily only mild, made him cough and his eyes smart and finally shut. The water poured out of them as eddies of wind made the gas stronger, and for a time he stood there utterly helpless. All around him men grunted and coughed, and lurched about helpless as he was, deprived of sight for the time. He heard odd fragments of conversation: "The front line has broken—gassed out. They're through in thousands—We're done for—Let's go." And then clear above the shelling, which had now started furiously, he heard a voice which he recognised as belonging to one of the Staff officers

of his brigade. "The first man who *does* go I shoot. Sit down! Keep your pads on, and wait for orders."

Down the road came a few stragglers—men who had broken from the front line and from the reserve trenches. One or two were slightly gassed; one or two were wounded; several were neither.

"And what are you doing?" asked the same officer, planting himself in the middle of the road. "Wounded men in there! The remainder join that party and wait for orders!"

"But they're through us," muttered a man, pushing past the officer. "I'm off."

"Did you hear my order?" said the officer sternly catching his arm. "Get in there—or I'll shoot you."

"Lemme go, curse you," howled the man, shaking off his hand and lurching on—while the others paused in hesitation. There was a sharp crack, and with a grunt the man subsided in the road twitching. The Staff officer turned round, and with his revolver still in his hand pointed to the party sitting down by Gerald. Without a word the men went there.

"I am going up to see what's happening," he told Gerald. "Get these men below in the cellars and keep them there. It's the shelling will do the damage now—the gas is over."

"Was it a bad attack?" asked Gerald.

"One of the worst we've had. One part of the line has been pierced, but the men have stuck it well

everywhere else. Mercifully we've almost avoided it here." And with that he was gone.

Two hours later the wounded started to come down the road, and with them men who had really been gassed badly—probably through having mislaid their pads and not being able to find them in time. Some were on stretchers and some were walking. Some ran a few steps and then collapsed, panting and gasping on the road; some lurched into the ditch and lay there vomiting, and on them all impartially there rained down a hail of shrapnel. In the dressing station they arranged them in rows; and that day two sweating doctors handled over seven hundred cases. For the gassed men, wheezing, gasping, fighting for breath, with their faces green and their foreheads dripping, they could do next to nothing. In ambulances they got them away as fast as they could down the shell-swept road—and still they came pouring in without cessation. Gerald watching the poor, struggling crowd, swore softly under his breath. He hadn't seen gas and its effects before, and the first time you see it you generally feel like killing something German to ease the strain. And it was at this moment that a bursting shell scattered a bunch of staggering men and almost blew an officer coming down the road into his arms.

The officer smiled at him feebly and then wiped some froth from his lips with the back of his hand. He stood there swaying, his breath coming and going

like a horse that's touched in the wind after being galloped. Out of one sleeve the blood was pouring, and with his hand he'd made a great smear of blood across his mouth. His face was green, and the gas sweat was all over him.

"Good God!" muttered Gerald. "Sit down, my dear fellow."

"No," he answered; "I must get on." He spoke slowly and with terrible difficulty, passing his tongue over his lips from time to time and staring fixedly at Gerald. "Where is the general? I have been sent to give him a message." With a dreadful tearing noise in his throat, he started to try to be sick. The paroxysm lasted about five minutes, and then he pulled himself together again.

"Give me the message. I'll take it," said Gerald quietly.

"Listen," said the officer, sitting down and heaving backwards and forwards. "Listen, for I'm done in. They've broken through on our left. There aren't many of them, but our left has had to give." Another paroxysm came on, and the poor lad rolled in the gutter, twisting and squirming. "The gas caught me in my dug-out," he croaked, "and I couldn't find my pad. Just like me, always lose everything." Gerald supported his head, and again wiped the froth from his mouth. "Our men," and the wheezing voice continued at intervals, "our men are gassed to blazes, but they're all up there. They've not fallen back ex-

cept on the left, where they were up in the air. Poor chaps! Lying in heaps being sick. Noise in trenches like bellows out of work. It's a swine's game, this gas." Again the tearing and gasping. "Tell the gunners to fire. For God's sake get 'em to fire. Their infantry all over the place, and we're getting about one shell of ours to twenty of theirs. Oh, God, this is awful!" and he tore at his collar.

"I'll go and find the general at once," said Gerald.

The officer nodded. "Good. I'll stop here till I'm better, and then I suppose I must go back to the boys. Poor devils! and I'm away out of it." He croaked hideously. "My men never budged, and now they're being shelled to bits—and they're helpless. Get reserves, man; get reinforcements. For Heaven's sake, hurry. No one seems to know what's happening—and it's been awful up there."

And so Gerald left him sitting by the side of the road, his eyes staring fixedly at nothing, periodically wiping the froth from his lips with a hand that left a crimson smear wherever it touched. And there the stretcher-bearers found him ten minutes later—one of hundreds of similar cases reported so tersely as "suffering from gas poisoning." And here—having staggered across our horizon—he passes out again. Whether he lived or died I know not—that man with the shattered arm and wet green face, who had brought back the message from the men whose left flank was surrounded.

All I know is that a quarter of an hour later Gerald was giving the report to the general—a report which confirmed the opinion of the situation which the Staff had already formed. Half an hour later Gerald's battalion was ordered to counter-attack and, if they could get as far, fill the gap. Exactly five minutes from the time when the battalion passed the reserve trenches and, in extended order, pressed forward, my hero took it. He took it in the leg, and he took it in the arm from a high-explosive shrapnel, and went down for the count. They didn't get back all the ground lost, but they did very nearly—though of this Gerald knew nothing. He was bad—distinctly bad. He remembers dimly the agony the ambulance gave his arm that night, and has hazy recollections of a dear woman in a hospital train. He had landed at Havre on a Tuesday; that day fortnight he left Boulogne in a hospital ship. Back up the ancestral home founded on something in tins he will go in due course; back to those same beautiful things—creations was the word—who graced the ancestral drawing-room some months ago.

The situation is fraught with peril. As I have whispered, his income will be something over five figures one day, and the creations have taken up nursing.

But, somehow or other, his views on life have changed, and I think the creations may have their work cut out.

CHAPTER XII

THE END OF "WIPERS"

A NICE balmy day, a good motor-car, and a first-class lunch in prospect. Such was my comparatively enviable state less than a month ago. True, the motor-car's springs had had six months' joy riding on the roads of Flanders, and the lunch was to be in Ypres; but one can't have everything—and Wipers was quite a pleasant spot then. In the square, souvenir hunters wandered through the Cloth Hall and the cathedral intent on strange remnants of metal for the curious at home. Tobacco shops did a roaring trade—market day was on. Villainous fragments of fried fish changed hands for a consideration, and everyone was happy and contented.

Into a delightful little shop I ultimately found my way. Twelve small tables, spread with spotless linen, and, needless to say, full of officers satisfying the inner man, presided over by two charming French girls, seemed good enough for me, and, sure enough, the luncheon was on a par with the girls, which is saying "some" in the vernacular. As I left with a consignment of the most excellent white wine, for thirsty officers elsewhere, two soldiers passed me.

"Say, Bill," said one, "this 'ere Wipers is a bit of orl right. They can leave me here as long as they likes." And as I crossed the railway at the western end of the town, one shell passed sullenly overhead, the first I had heard that day—the only discordant note, the only sound of war. That was a month ago.

A fortnight ago duty took me past the same little shop and through the square. This time I did not linger—there were no souvenir hunters; there was no market-day. Again I was in a motor-car, but this time I rushed through—hoping for the best. Instead of one shell they came in their hundreds. A drunken, swaying noise through the air, like a tramway-car going homewards on its last journey down an empty road, a crash and the roar of the explosion, mixed with the rumble of falling masonry. Another house gone in the dead city. Huge holes clawed up in the *pavé* road, and in every corner dead and twisted horses. Children lying torn in the gutter, women and men gaping in their death agony. Here and there a soldier; legs, arms, fragments of what were once living, breathing creatures. And in nearly every house, had one gone in, little groups of civilians still moaning and muttering feebly. They had crept into their homes, frightened, terrified—to wait for the death that must come. And without cessation came the shells. In one corner a motor-ambulance stood drunkenly on three wheels; in the middle a wagon overturned with four dead horses still fast in the

traces, and underneath them stuck out two legs, the legs of what had been the lead driver. A city of the dead—not a sign of visible life, save only our car picking its way carefully through dead horses and masses of bricks fallen across the road. Yesterday's tobacco buyers stiff in the gutters; yesterday's vendors of fish dying in some corner like rats in a trap; yesterday's luncheon-shop a huge hole in the wall with the rafters twisted and broken, and the floor of the room above scattered over the twelve tables with the spotless linen. And perhaps—worst of all—the terrible, all-pervading stench which seemed to brood like a pall over everything.

At last we were clear of the square and getting into the open east of the town. Over the bridge and up a slight incline—then clear above the noise of the car for one most unpleasant second we heard the last tram going home. The next second a deafening roar, and we were in the centre of the stifling black fumes of a present from Krupps. All would have been well but for a dead horse in the centre of the road, which caused an abrupt stop. We left the car till the fumes had cleared away, and stumbled, gasping, into the air, with the water pouring out of our eyes and the fumes catching our throats. And it was then we saw yesterday's Tommy who had regarded "Wipers" as a "bit of orl right."

Staggering down the road came three men, lurching from side to side, bumping up against one another, then falling apart: ever and anon collapsing in the

road or the gutter, disappearing into shell holes, tripping over débris, over trees, over dead things. Gasping and panting they came on with their legs not strong enough to hold them. Nearer they came, and their faces were yellow-green, and their foreheads were thick with sweat, though the evening was chilly. They were half-sobbing, half-moaning, with their collars open and their clothes coated in mud. And one of them had a great gash over his head. Just before they reached us he collapsed in the ditch—for the last time. He was leaning forward and heaving with the agony of getting his breath. A froth was forming on his mouth, and his face was green.

“In God’s name what is it?” we asked one of the other two as they staggered by. He stared at us vacantly, gasped out the one word, “Gas,” and disappeared into the shambles of Ypres. We had not seen it before. We have since, and the first horror of it is past: but as there is a heaven above, there is not a man who has seen its effects who would not give every worldly possession he has to be able slowly to dribble the contents of a cylinder of the foulest and most diabolical invention yet conceived into a trench full of the originators of a device which most savages would be ashamed to use. We picked up the poor devil in the ditch and got him to a dressing station. He died in fearful agony half an hour after, so I subsequently heard. That was a fortnight ago.

Four nights ago there was a great light in the sky.

Standing up out of the blaze what was left of the cathedral showed up like a blackened sentinel. Through the trees the yellow flames shone with a lurid glow, and the crashing of falling houses completed the destruction started by German shells. The sight was one which will never be forgotten by those who saw it—that final gutting of a stricken town. For three days and three nights it blazed, and now all is over. It is the best end for that historic city—the scene of so much senseless carnage. How many of its harmless inhabitants have perished with it will never be known—will probably never be even guessed at. But fire is a purifier, and purification was necessary in Ypres.



CHAPTER XIII

THE BLACK SHEEP

NO one could have called Herbert Jones brilliant: his best friend—if he possessed such a thing—would not have predicted a great future for him. Into the manner of his living during the first twenty years of his life it would be well not to enquire too closely. Herbert Jones—more generally known to his intimates as 'Erb—was a dweller in dark places; one of the human flotsam who emerge like rats from their holes at night and spend in the nearest gin palace the few pence they have nefariously earned during the day. He was just a product of the gutter; from the gutter he came and to the gutter he returned in the fullness of time. And this was the way of it.

Personally I never made the acquaintance of Herbert Jones: such information as I possess of his disreputable history was told me one night at a dreary cross-roads three or four miles east of Ypres, with the greenish flares lighting the sky all around us and the stench of dead horses in our nostrils. My informant was one of my drivers who had lived in the same street with him in London.

What it was that had caused a temporary ebullition

of decent feeling in such an unpromising subject I was unable to find out. It was something to do with a lady called Lizzie Green, too much gin, and a picture palace which displayed a film of the Royal Horse Artillery galloping into action. In view of the fact that ninety per cent. of Herbert's income was derived from making himself a public pest at jobbing stables, he quite naturally posed as a horsey youth, and that fact, coupled with Lizzie, the gin, and the film, apparently produced this one ebullition of decent feeling of which I have spoken. He enlisted. The very next day he presented his unprepossessing personality at a recruiting office—and his slum knew him no more. The Royal Regiment swallowed him up, gave him a uniform, decent food, and prepared to make a man of him.

It failed—hopelessly, dismally. The revilings of officers, the cursings of sergeants, the blasphemy of bombardiers alike failed to produce the slightest effect. His conduct sheet rapidly assumed the appearance of a full-sized novel; but there he was and there he remained—a driver in the Field Artillery, and the black sheep of his battery.

A year later found him at Havre. From there he drifted to Rouen—reviled by everyone who had the misfortune to have anything to do with him. At last, like a bad penny, he turned up again at his old battery, to the horror of all concerned, who thought they had effectually got rid of him at the beginning of the

war. But the ways of record officers are wonderful—passing the ways of women. So when the news was broken to the major, and he had recovered, he ordered him to be put with the ammunition limbers, whose job it is to take ammunition to the battery nightly when they are in action and then return for more. And the captain, whose job is largely ammunition supply, heard his history from the sergeant whose job is entirely ammunition supply, and their remarks would be unprintable. Two nights later the battery was in action in the salient somewhere east of Ypres, and the reserves of ammunition were away back somewhere to the west, and Herbert Jones was with the reserves.

In the official *communiqués* it was known as a time of artillery activity in the neighbourhood of Ypres: in the *communiqués* of the battery it was known as a time of hell let loose; but especially was it so known among the ammunition limbers who nightly passed from west to east with full limbers and returned from east to west with empty ones. For, as may be seen by anyone who takes the trouble to procure an ordnance map, all roads from the west converge on Ypres, and having passed through the neck of the bottle diverge again to the east; which fact is not unknown to the Germans. So the limbers do not linger on the journey, but, at an interval of ten yards or so, they travel as fast as straining horseflesh and sweating drivers can make them. In many places

a map is not necessary—even to a stranger. The road is clearly marked by what has been left at its side—the toll of previous journeys of limbers, who went out six in number and returned only four. And, should the stranger be blind, another of his senses will lead him unfailingly along the right road, for these derelict limbers and their horses have been there some time.

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The Germans were searching the road leading to Ypres from the cross-roads where I sat waiting for an infantry working party that had gone astray, on the first of the two occasions on which I saw 'Erb: that is to say, they were plastering a bit of the road with shells in the hope of bagging anything living on that bit. In the distance the rumble of wagons up the road was becoming louder every minute. All around us—for it was a salient—green flares lit up the sky, showing where the front trenches lay, and occasionally rolls of musketry, swelling to a crescendo and then dying fitfully away, came at intervals from different parts of the line. A few spent bullets pinged viciously overhead, and almost without cessation came the angry roar of high-explosive shrapnel bursting along the road or over the desolate plough on each side. Close to me, at the cross-roads itself, stood the remnants of a village—perhaps ten houses in all. The flares shone through the ruined walls—the place

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stank of death. Save for the noise it was a Dead World—a no man's land. In the little village two motor-ambulances balanced themselves like drunken derelicts. Dead horses lay stiff and distended across the road, and a few overturned wagons completed the scene of desolation.

Then, suddenly, over a slight rise swung the ammunition limbers—grunting, cursing, bumping into shell holes and out again. I watched them pass and swing away right-handed. In the rear came six pairs of horses, spare—in case. And as the last one went by a man beside me said, "Hullo! there's 'Erb." It was then I got his history.

An hour later I was back at that same place, having caught my wandering infantry party and placed them on a line with instructions to dig and continue digging till their arms dropped off. But when I got there I found it had changed a little in appearance, that dreary cross-roads. Just opposite the bank where I had sat were two horses lying in the road and the legs of a man stuck out from underneath them, and they had not been there an hour before. The horses' heads were turned towards Ypres, and it seemed to me that there was something familiar in the markings of one of them.

With the help of my drivers we pulled out the man. It was no good—but one never knows.

And the same voice said, "Why, it's 'Erb."

Crashing back on the return journey, the limbers

empty, 'Erb again bringing up the rear with the spares,
one blinding flash, and——

We laid him in the gutter.

Did I not say that he came from the gutter? And
to the gutter he returned in the fullness of time.

CHAPTER XIV

JAMES AND THE LAND MINE

THE reasons in triplicate which I gave to the general as to why the land mines had exploded at the wrong time are neither here nor there. Officially he accepted them, but it was all very trying, and entirely due to James.

James is a great thorn in my side; he always has been. He is always doing unexpected things—thereby causing much alarm and despondency among everyone who has the doubtful pleasure of his acquaintance. The last time I saw him before the war was at the Pytchley Hunt ball some eighteen months ago, and though I hesitate to give the incident which occurred there in view of possible doubts being cast on my veracity, and also because of its apparently trifling nature, yet its connection with the sad failure of the land mines is too deep for me to disregard it.

Know then that James had on a pair of new silk breeches purchased at great cost from his already despondent tailor. His pink coat was lovely—James always was lovely before the war. In addition to all that there was a lobster *mousse*. I know it all sounds very difficult, but the fate of nations sometimes depends on far less than a lobster *mousse*. I discovered

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fill a box of some sort with guncotton, arranging the lid in such a way that it does not quite shut. You then place the box in the ground with the lid just below the surface, and the arrangement is such that should some unwary person tread on the lid it promptly does shut, thereby driving a nail into a detonator and sending off the mine. This causes a severe shock to the person who inadvertently treads on it, at the same time causing great excitement among those of his neighbours who remain alive. My idea was to crawl to the trench, fill it in, and, arranging the mines in suitable positions, retire and await developments.

My difficulty—though it may seem a strange one to some people—was to find the trench, and having found it to get the men there without being seen. It is astonishing how easy it is to lose one's way when crawling about a large open field at night, and the bit of trench I was seeking for was not very long. The German flares, which are extremely good—ininitely better than—but I will be discreet, though it is perfectly true—render the process of walking about close to their trenches a somewhat hazardous one. Should one of these flares fall on the ground, so that you are between it and the Germans, the only way to escape detection is to lie perfectly motionless until it burns out. All of which tends to make progress slow. It was while one of them was burning itself out, and I was endeavouring to set a safe course between two shell holes and a dead German, that James appeared

out of the blue from nowhere. He had six German helmets, a few bayonets, and a variety of other trophies, and was making a noise like a wagonful of saucepans on a cobbled road.

"Dear old boy," he cried, dropping everything on the ground, "it's the deuce of a time since I've seen you."

"It is one of the few things for which I can honestly return thanks," I remarked somewhat shortly. "Would you like a megaphone to tell them I'm coming up to work on that trench in front?"

"What are you going to do?" he demanded.

"Fill it in and mine it when I can find it."

"Splendid," he answered. "I'm your man. These," and he kicked the trophies, which promptly gave forth a crashing noise, "all come from it. I've just been there. I will guide you."

Under normal circumstances I would as soon have been guided by a young elephant; but, as I say, James is difficult—very difficult.

"I think there are one or two Germans in it," he whispered as we crawled on. "I heard one talking and threw a bomb over the traverse, but as I'd forgotten to light it it didn't go off."

The next instant he disappeared and the procession came to an abrupt halt. A wallowing noise was heard, and James's head came into view again. "This is the trench," he remarked tersely, "the cess-pit end." It was one of the few occasions that night that I laughed.

My subaltern extended the men while I entreated James to go. I thanked him for his valuable assistance and earnestly begged him to depart. He could help me no more, and I knew there would be a calamity if he remained. It was all in vain, James was out for a night of it, so ultimately I left him to his own devices and departed to see what was happening. I found everything quite peaceful; six land mines were lying at the bottom of a bit of trench where we could get them when wanted, and the trench, all except about thirty yards, was being filled in. The thirty yards would be filled in later and would be mined. One could hear the Germans talking in their trenches, and for the moment an air of complete calm brooded over the scene.

No sniper sniped, no gunner gunned. A few gaunt trees creaked slightly in the breeze, and an occasional rifle crack came sharply through the night from farther down the line. Then James fell into the trench again. This time he missed the cess-pit and hit a German. As I have said before, it was all most annoying.

A worrying noise was heard, and every one fell flat on his face as a rapid fusillade broke out from all directions. Flares went up by the score and everything became unpleasantly lively. The only person who seemed quite oblivious of all the turmoil was James. He suddenly loomed up in front of me dragging a diminutive Boche behind him.

"Do you remember"—his voice was quite shaken

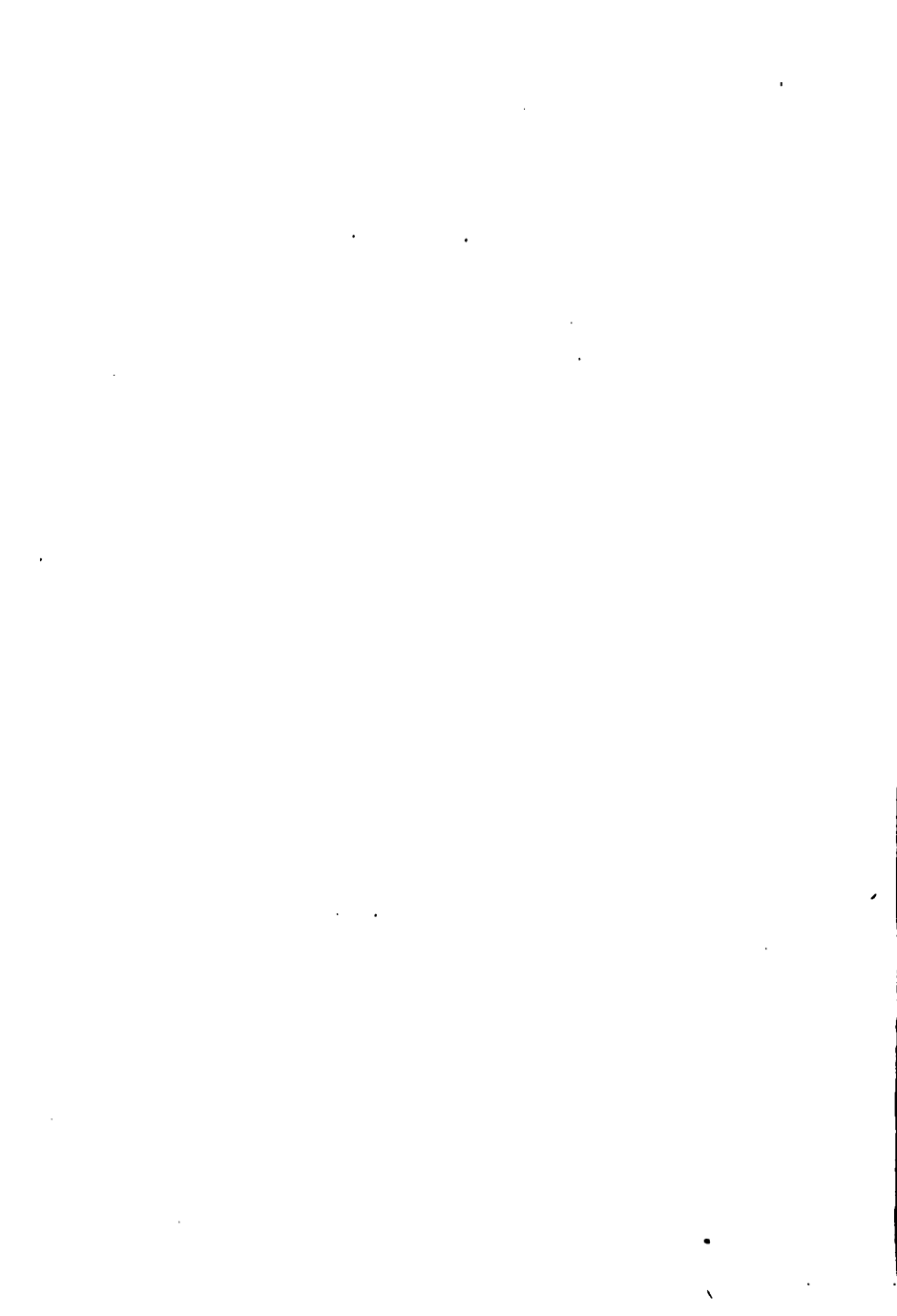
with rage—"the accursed swine-dog of a waiter at the Pytchley Hunt ball who laughed when I sat on the grapes? I have him here."

"Lie still, you fool," I muttered. "Do you want to get every one 'scuppered'?"

Of course, James paid not the slightest attention. "I have him here," he grunted. "I know that scar, you horrible reptile," and he shook the little brute till his teeth rattled. "Are you aware that you spoilt the best pair of silk breeches I ever had, and I haven't paid for them yet?" And with that he threw him into the trench close by.

Like James at the ball, he sat down and arose hurriedly. James would select the bit of trench where the land mines were. There was a most deafening roar as all six went off, and that waiter will undoubtedly wait no more. James himself, I'm glad to say, was stunned, which kept him quiet for a time, but he was about the only quiet thing in France for the next hour. It is my personal belief that in addition to all the batteries on each side which opened fire simultaneously, the mysterious gun which has bombarded Dunkirk let drive as well.

For two hours I lay in a wet trench, with a pick in the small of my back and James on top of me. About three we all went home, rather the worse for wear. James said he had a headache and wouldn't play any more. I got one giving my reasons to the general in triplicate.



CHAPTER XV

THE SIXTH DRUNK

NO. 10,379 Private Michael O'Flannigan, you are charged, first, with being absent from roll-call on the 21st instant until 3.30 a. m. on the 22nd, a period of five hours and thirty minutes; second, being drunk; third, assaulting an N. C. O. in the execution of his duty."

The colonel leant back in his chair in the orderly-room and gazed through his eyeglass at the huge bullet-headed Irishman standing on the other side of the table.

The evidence was uninteresting, as such evidence usually is, the only humorous relief being afforded by the sergeant of the guard on the night of the 21st, who came in with an eye of cerulean hue which all the efforts of his painstaking wife with raw beefsteak had been unable to subdue. It appeared from his evidence that he and Private O'Flannigan had had a slight difference of opinion, and that the accused had struck him in the face with his fist.

"What have you got to say, Private O'Flannigan?"

"Shure, 'twas one of the boys from Waterford, sorr, I met in the town yonder, and we put away a bit

empty, 'Erb again bringing up the rear with the spares,
one blinding flash, and——

We laid him in the gutter.

Did I not say that he came from the gutter? And
to the gutter he returned in the fullness of time.

CHAPTER XIV

JAMES AND THE LAND MINE

THE reasons in triplicate which I gave to the general as to why the land mines had exploded at the wrong time are neither here nor there. Officially he accepted them, but it was all very trying, and entirely due to James.

James is a great thorn in my side; he always has been. He is always doing unexpected things—thereby causing much alarm and despondency among everyone who has the doubtful pleasure of his acquaintance. The last time I saw him before the war was at the Pytchley Hunt ball some eighteen months ago, and though I hesitate to give the incident which occurred there in view of possible doubts being cast on my veracity, and also because of its apparently trifling nature, yet its connection with the sad failure of the land mines is too deep for me to disregard it.

Know then that James had on a pair of new silk breeches purchased at great cost from his already despondent tailor. His pink coat was lovely—James always was lovely before the war. In addition to all that there was a lobster *mousse*. I know it all sounds very difficult, but the fate of nations sometimes depends on far less than a lobster *mousse*. I discovered

the burst of firing all along the line proclaimed an attack. Moreover, it was an attack in earnest. The Huns reached the trenches and got into them, and, though they were twice driven out, bit by bit the battalion retired. O'Flannigan's trench being at the end and more or less unconnected with the others, the Germans passed it by: though, as the sergeant in charge very rightly realised, it could only be a question of a very few minutes before it would be untenable.

"Get out," he ordered, "and join up with the regiment in the trenches behind."

"And phwat of the issue of rum?" demanded Michael O'Flannigan, whose rifle was too hot to hold.

"You may think yourself lucky, my bucko, if you ever get another," said the sergeant. "Get out."

O'Flannigan looked at him. "If you're after thinking that I would be leaving the rum to them swine you are mistaken, sergeant."

"Are you going, O'Flannigan?"

"Bedad, I'm not! Not if the King himself was asking me."

At that moment a Boche rounded the traverse. With a howl of joy O'Flannigan hit him with the butt of his rifle. From that moment he went mad. He hurled himself over the traverse and started. It was full of Germans—but this wild apparition finished them. Roaring like a bull and twisting his rifle round his head like a cane, the Irishman fell on them—and as they broke, he saw in the corner the well-

beloved earthenware pot containing the rum. He seized the thing in his right hand and poured most of the liquid down his throat, while the rest of it ran over his face and clothes. And then Michael O'Flannigan ran amok. His great voice rose high above the roar of the rifles, as, with the empty rum jar in one hand and his clubbed rifle in the other he went down the trench.

What he must have looked like with the red liquid pouring down his face, his hands covered with it, his clothes dripping with it, in that eerie half-light, Heaven knows. He was shouting an old song of the Fenian days, and it is possible they thought he was the devil. He was no bad substitute anyway. And then of a sudden his regiment ceased to shoot from the trenches behind and a voice cried, "O'Flannigan!" It passed down the line, and as one man, they came back howling, "O'Flannigan!" They drove the Germans out like chaff and fell back into the lost trenches—all save one little party, who paused at the sight in front of them. There stood O'Flannigan astride the colonel, who was mortally wounded. They heard rather than saw the blow that fetched home on the head of a Prussian officer—almost simultaneously with the crack of his revolver. They saw him go down with a crushed skull, while the big earthenware jar shattered to pieces. They saw O'Flannigan stagger a little and then look round—still with the top of the rum jar in his hand.

"You are back," he cried. "It is well, but the rum is gone."

And then the colonel spoke. He was near death and wandering. "The regiment has never yet lost a trench. Has it, O'Flannigan, you scoundrel?" And he peered at him.

"It has not, sorr," answered the Irishman.

"I thought," muttered the dying officer, "there were Prussians in here a moment ago."

"They were, sorr, but they were not liking it, so they went."

Suddenly the colonel raised himself on his elbow. "What's the matter with you, O'Flannigan? What's that red on your face? It's rum, you blackguard. You're drunk again." His voice was growing weaker. "Sixth time . . . discharged . . . incorrigible and worthless." And with that he died.

They looked at O'Flannigan, and he was sagging at the knees. "Bedad! 'tis not all rum, the red on me, colonel, dear."

He slowly collapsed and lay still.

And that is the story of the strange table adornment of the depot mess, the depot of the regiment who have never yet lost a trench.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MINE

LAST night we exploded a mine under a redoubt in the enemy's trenches, and successfully occupied the crater. A considerable number of Germans were killed." Thus the official communiqué.

And yet the great powers that be have no idea that this small local success was entirely due to David Jones—sometime miner in a coal-field in South Wales. In fact, the betting is about a fiver to an acid drop that they have no idea that he exists. Bar the police in his local village, who disliked him intensely, and his N. C. O.'s out here, who disliked him still more, very few people do know that he exists. Undersized, in every way an undesirable acquaintance, a silent and morose man, it is nevertheless an undoubted fact that had it not been for David Jones, the aforementioned crater would not have been occupied, and the considerable number of defunct Germans would now be alive. And this was the way of it.

The presence of David in such an unhealthy locality as Flanders was entirely due to his regrettable lack of distinction between *meum* and *tuum*. Exactly what occurred is immaterial, but deciding that the evils he

knew of in the shape of prison were probably worse than the evils he did not know of, in the shape of the Hun, our friend managed to evade the too pressing attentions of the police, and in due course found himself across the water in one of the new formed Tunnelling Companies. These companies are composed almost entirely of those who from their earliest infancy have been reared in the atmosphere of moles rather than in the atmosphere of men, and have as their work out here the great game of mining and countermining. Early in the proceedings it became apparent to those whose duty and privilege it was to command David Jones that his affection for woolly bears, pip squeaks, crumps, Marias, and others of the great *genus obus* was not of that type which passeth the love of women. It is even rumoured that on one occasion, in a wood behind the line which was receiving attention from the Hun, and in which lay our hero's temporary abode, he made a voluntary confession of several real and a few imaginary misdeeds of his early youth in the hope of being sent back to prison and safety. Which is all by the way.

In the course of time, however, the Tunnelling Company was called upon to justify its existence—to become again as moles and not men, to gasp and sweat in the bowels of the earth—and thus the wood where they had been knew them no more. In front of our line, poked out a little from the German lines, there lay a semi-circular redoubt. It was strong, very strong, as many officers in many regiments of foot

will confirm. The ground in front of it bore eloquent testimony to frequent unsuccessful attempts to dislodge the enemy. Gunners had gunned it preparatory to assaults, gunners had gunned it all day and every day for many days, but so far in vain. Always were the infantry met with the same deadly cross machine-gun fire did they set foot over our parapet. Wherefore having failed to subdue it from the air, and over the ground, they sent for the miners and told them to try from underneath. And thus it was that David Jones came again to his natural element.

Now I venture to think that of that natural element comparatively little is known by those who remain in the island over the water. The charge of cavalry, the thunder of guns, the grim infantry attack through the swirling mists of dawn, these can be visualised, can be imagined. Pictures by artists, quite a small percentage of which are more or less accurate, give to those who have never seen the dread drama of war a tolerably accurate impression of what happens. But of David Jones's natural element, of that work which goes on day and night, ceaselessly, burrowing under the ground nearer, ever nearer, the goal, there are no pictures to draw. And so before I come to tell of what my ruffian miner did under the earth in the place where the infantry had charged so often in vain, and of the German engineer officer who was discovered with part of his helmet forced into his brain and his head split asunder, I would digress for a space, and try to the best of my ability to paint

that setting in which the human moles live and move and have their being.

I would take those who may care to follow me to the front-line trenches, where at a certain place—a sap head, perchance, or a Johnson hole just behind, or even in the trench itself—a deep, shored up shaft has been sunk. From the front nothing is visible, and, by suitable screening, the inquisitive ones who fly overhead are prevented from seeing anything to cheer them up and make them excited. At the bottom of the shaft two men are sitting shovelling a heap of loose earth into buckets. Each bucket as it is filled is hoisted up on a rope working on a pulley—only to be lowered again empty when the earth has been tipped into some convenient shell hole, screened from the sight of the gentlemen opposite. If seen, the steady exodus of earth from a trench at one point is apt to give the Hun furiously to think—always an unwise proceeding. In front of the two men is a low black hole from which at regular intervals there comes a man, stripped to the waist, glistening with sweat, pushing a small trolley on leathered wheels. While the two men silently tip up the trolley and empty out the earth, he stands blinking for a moment at the patch of blue sky, only to disappear into the low, black hole, his trolley empty. Everything is silent; there is no hurry. Perhaps the occasional zip of a bullet, a lazy crump of a shell down the line; that is all, that and the low,

black hole—ominous, sinister, the entrance to the mine.

And now mind your head; let us follow the man with the empty trolley. From far ahead comes the muffled thud of a pick, and behind one the light of day is streaming through the opening of the gallery. Bent almost double, one creeps forward, guiding oneself by one's hands as they touch walls that feel dank and cold. Then a turning, and utter, absolute darkness, until far ahead a faint light appears, the light at the front face of the mine. Another man pushing a full trolley squeezes past you, his body gleaming faintly white in the darkness, while steadily, without cessation, by the light of an electric lamp, the man on the front face goes on picking, picking, his body glistening as if it had been dipped in oil. When he is tired, another takes his place; there is no pause. Each yard as it is taken out is shored up with mine cases and sheeting, otherwise the whole thing may collapse on your head.

As you go on, your hands against the sides, you will find possibly an opening on one side or the other—the opening of another gallery, a gallery with a T head at the end, all finished. No earth is being carted from here, there is for the time no one in it; it is a listening gallery, and with the listening gallery and all it stands for we come to grips with the real drama of mining. Were it merely the mechanical removal of earth, the mechanical making of a tunnel from one place to another, it would perhaps be a safer occupa-

tion, but just as inspiring to write about as a new cure for corns. Moreover, it was from a listening gallery that David Jones—still, all in good time.

Mining, like most games, is one at which two can play, and it is not a matter of great surprise that neither side will allow the other one to play unmolested. Therefore, where there is mining there also is countermining, and the two operations are not exactly the same. For while mining is essentially an offensive act designed to blow up a portion of the enemy's trenches and form a crater in which men may shelter, countermining is essentially a defensive act designed merely to wreck the advancing mine. Thus both sides may at the same time be running out a mine towards the opposite trenches, and also a countermine in another part of the line to meet the hostile mine. Moreover, in a mine the charge is large, to effect as much damage as possible; in a countermine the charge is small, in order not to make too large a crater in which the enemy may unscrupulously take up his abode. All of which is essential for the proper understanding of David Jones—his act.

At periods, therefore, during the twenty-four hours all work in the mine is suspended. The muffled tapping of the pick ceases, and silence as of the grave reigns in the underground world. And during this period in each of the listening galleries skilled men stand with their ears glued to the earth, and some with instruments of which I may not speak, and listen. There under the earth, with their dead lying above

them, in that No Man's Land between the trenches, with ears strained in the silence, a silence that can be felt, they listen for that dread noise, the muffled tap-tap of the enemy's miner's countermining towards them. Sometimes the mine goes through without any countermine at all—more often not. Frequently the countermine is exploded too soon, or the direction is wrong and no damage is done, but sometimes it is otherwise. Sometimes there will be a dull, rumbling explosion—a few mine cases will fly upwards from the centre of the ground between the trenches, perhaps a boot or a head, but nothing more. And the miners will mine no more. The countermine has been successful.

But the estimation of distance and direction under the ground by listening to the muffled tap of the other man is a tricky business, and depends on many things. A fissure in the right direction, and it will sound close to, when in reality it is far away; an impervious strata across your front, and it will sound afar off, when in reality it is near.

Which all goes to show that it is a game of chance. But I would ask the arm-chair critic, the man in the street, if he have a spark of imagination, to transport himself to a mine where there is yet ten yards to go. Whenever for a space the moles stop, and the underworld silence settles like a pall, they hear the tap-tap of the other workers' ghostly fingers coming out to meet them. And then the tap-tap ceases. Have the others gone in the wrong direction, bearing away

from them, or are they close to, three or four feet away even now charging the head of their counter-mine with explosive? Shall they go on, for time is precious, and finish that ten yards, or shall they stop awhile and see if they fire their countermine? Is it safe to do another two yards before they stop, or is it even now too late? Is that great tearing explosion coming at once, in the next second, or isn't it coming at all? And all the time those glistening, sweating men carry on—pick, pick, pick. It is for the officer in charge to decide, and until then——

Now, I don't for a moment think that David Jones regarded the matter at all in that light. An over-mastering relief at being in a place where whizz-bangs cease from troubling and pip-squeaks are at rest drove out all lesser thoughts. When it happened he was as nearly contented as he was capable of being. The mine was ready to fire. Its head was well under the centre of the German redoubt, and all the morning slabs of gun-cotton had been carried up to the head. With loving care the electric leads had been taken up, the detonator fixed up—everything was ready. The earth to damp the charge, so laboriously carted out, had been brought back again, to prevent the force of the explosion blowing down the gallery instead of going upwards. And to the casual observer it seemed that the gallery ended merely in a solid wall of earth, into which vanished two harmless-looking black leads.

Now, the mine was going to be fired at seven o'clock

in the evening. One does not prepare with great trouble an elaborate affair of that sort and then loose it off at any old time. All the infantry were warned—the gunners were warned—staff officers at discreet distances buzzed like bluebottles. As soon as it went off the infantry were to rush the redoubt, the gunners were to shell behind to prevent the counter-attack, and the staff were to have dinner. Which was all very right and proper.

The only one of these details which interested David was the hour at which the mine was to go off. Until that time he had fully made up his mind that the T head listening gallery, where he was comfortably smoking on a pile of sandbags, was a very much more desirable place than the trench up above, where, at or about the hour of five-thirty, the Hun was wont to hate with shells of great violence coming from a direction which almost enfiladed the trench. He recalled with distinct aversion the man next him the previous evening who had stopped a large piece of shell with his head.

At the same time he had no intention of remaining in the T head when the mine went off. Six-thirty struck him as a good and propitious moment to take his departure to the dangers of the upper air. David Jones was not a man to take any risk that could be avoided, and the mere fact that every one had been ordered out of the mine had no bearing on the subject whatever. Like his personal courage, his sense of discipline was nil.

And so in the dark silence of the mine gallery, lying at ease on sandbags, with no horrible whistlings overhead, David Jones settled himself to rest and ruminates, and in the fullness of time he slept.

Now the mining operations had gone without a hitch. Apparently the Hun had no idea that his privacy was going to be invaded, and no sounds of countermining had been heard. Once, very faint in the distance, a tapping had been heard about three days after they had started. Since then it had not been repeated, and the officer in charge was not to be blamed for thinking that he had the show to himself. Nevertheless it is an undoubted fact that the thing which woke David Jones was a large piece of earth falling on his face, and a light shining through the face of the listening gallery. The next moment he heard a muttered ejaculation in a language he did not know, and great masses of earth rained down on his face while the light was extinguished. His training as a miner enabled him to see in a moment what had happened. That part of his mind worked instinctively. A German gallery had opened into their listening gallery. Some strata of soil had rendered it almost soundless, and his sleep during the last two hours had prevented him hearing the approach through the final two feet. All that he grasped in a flash; but what was far more to the point, he realised that in about two seconds he would be face to face with a horrible Hun, a prospect which turned him cold with horror. Had he been capable of getting up, had his legs been capable

of overcoming his terror, there is but little doubt that he would have fled to the safety of the open air. After all, a problematic shell is better than an encounter with a large and brutal man underground.

But before he could move, a head and shoulders followed by a body came through the opening and fell almost on top of him. A torch was cautiously flashed, and by its light the trembling David saw a large and brutal-looking man peering round. Then the man moved forward. Evidently he had seen that he was in a gallery off the main one, and had failed to see our hero sheltering behind the sandbags. For a long while there was silence. David could hear the German's heavy breathing, as he stood a few feet from him just where the main gallery crossed the entrance to the T head. He realised that he was afraid to flash his torch until he was quite certain there was no one about.

But now David's mind was moving with feverish activity. So far he had escaped detection—but supposing more of these terrible beings came. Supposing this one came back and did not overlook him again. The thought nerved him to action. Cautiously, without a sound he raised himself from behind the pile of sandbags and crept to the spot where the T head left the short gallery that connected it to the main one, and there he stood in the inky darkness with the German a few feet in front of him. His plan was to make a dash for safety when the German started to explore the main gallery.

It seemed an eternity—in reality it was about half a minute—before the light was again flashed cautiously into the darkness. It cast round in a circle and then came to a halt. He heard the sharp intake of the German's breath, and saw the light fixed on the two black leads. Then things moved quickly.

The German laid down his pick, and fumbled in his pocket for his wire-cutters. Those leads told their story plain for all to read. Again, in a flash, the dangers of his position struck David. This accursed Hun would cut the leads and then return, and run straight into him. He wouldn't bother to explore the gallery further. He would merely murder him, and pass on. A horrible thought.

With infinite caution he reached for the pick. The German was muttering to himself and trying to detach his wire-cutters from his belt. At last he had them free, and, flashing his torch once again, stooped forward to cut the lead. And as he did so with a grunt, David Jones struck—struck at the centre of the head outlined in the circle of light. There was a dreadful half-choked cry and—silence.

Two minutes later David Jones was in the trench looking fearfully over his shoulder as if expecting pursuit. The idea of warning the officer in charge that a German gallery had struck through into theirs never even entered his head. It was a matter of complete indifference to him if another Hun came in and cut the wire, so long as he wasn't on hand to

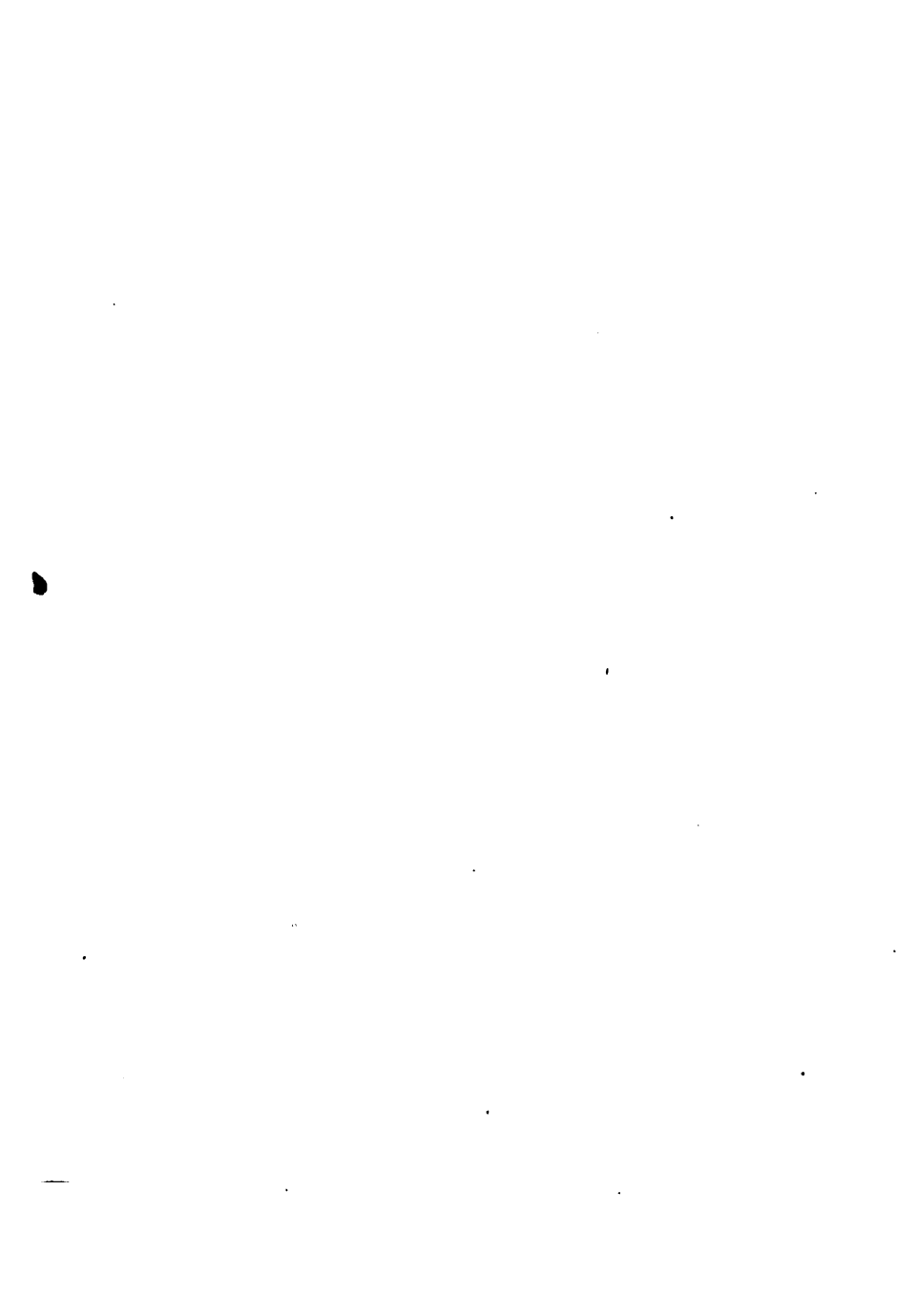
be cut too. So it was fortunate perhaps that David had overslept himself, as one minute after his arrival in the upper earth there was a deafening thunderous roar. A great mass of earth, roots, wood, and other fragments flew upwards and then came raining down again. The infantry were across in a flash—the curtain of shrapnel descended—and the staff had dinner.

There were two things that no one ever cleared up satisfactorily. One was the presence of a miner's pick, of a pattern different to that in use in the British Army, in the tool dump of a certain Tunnelling Company. But it was a very small thing, and no one worried.

The other was the presence of a German Engineer Officer in the mine shaft with his helmet, or part of it, in his brain. Various opinions were given by various people; but as they were all wrong, they don't matter. Anyway, the mine had been most successful—and everybody shook hands with everybody.

All, that is, except David Jones, who was undergoing Field Punishment Number One for stealing the emergency rum ration and getting drunk on it.

Which is really rather humorous when you come to think of it.



CHAPTER XVII

DRIVER ROBERT BROWN

FOUR or five years ago, in the dim, hazy time when Europe lay at peace, there arrived at the station in England where I was fortunate enough to be serving a batch of eight recruits. They were very raw and very untrained, and it was the doubtful pleasure of the unit in which I was, to undertake periodically the training of such batches in order to relieve a somewhat overtaxed dépôt elsewhere. This batch—like unto other similar batches—aspired to become drivers in His Majesty's Corps of Royal Engineers. Occasionally their aspirations were realised—more often not, for the terms of their service were two years with the colours and ten with the reserve, and at the end of two years the average man may just about be considered capable of looking after two horses and a set of harness—really looking after them—and not before. Then they go, or most of them, and the service knows them no more. However, all that is beside the point.

Wandering dispassionately round the stables one day, I perceived the eight, mounted on blankets, sitting on their horses, while a satirical and somewhat

livery rough-riding corporal commented on the defects of their figures, their general appearance, and their doubtful claim to existence at all, in a way that is not uncommon with rough riders. Then for the first time I saw Brown—Driver Robert Brown, to give him his full name.

“I ’ad a harnt once, No. 3. She was sixty-four, and weighed twenty stone. And if she’d ’a been sitting on that there ’orse of yours she’d have looked just like you: only ’er chest grew in front and not be’ind like yours.”

No. 3 was Driver Robert Brown. I passed on. The presence of an officer sometimes tends to check the airy persiflage which flows so gracefully from the lips of riding instructors.

A week after I inquired of the Corporal as to the progress of his charges. “Not bad, sir,” he said—“not bad. The best of them easy is that there Brown. He don’t look much on a horse—in fact, he looks like a sack o’ potatoes—but ’e’s a tryer, and we’ll turn ’im into something before we’ve done.”

Then one day—about four in the afternoon—I happened to wander through the stables. They were deserted apparently save for the stableman—until, in a corner, I came upon Driver Brown. He was giving his horse sugar, and making much of him—to use the riding-school phrase. We had a talk, and he told me things, when he got over his shyness—about his parents and where he lived, and that he loved animals, and a lot else besides. From then on

I kept my eye on Brown, and the more I did so, the more I liked him. He was no beauty—he was not particularly smart—but he was one of the best. His N.C.O.'s swore by him—his two horses had never looked better—his harness was spotless. In addition to that he played back in the football eleven, if not with great skill, at any rate with immense keenness. He had exactly the figure for a zealous full back, and was of the type who kicked with such vim that when he missed the ball—which he generally did—he invariably fell heavily to the ground. Thus Robert Brown—recruit.

When his two years were up, Brown elected to stay on in the Service. The Service consisting in this case of his commanding officer, his N.C.O.'s and myself, it could find no reason why he shouldn't—in fact, and on the contrary, many very excellent reasons why he should. So Brown took on for his seven. Shortly afterwards, owing to a marked propensity of my servant to combine the delights of old Scotch with the reprehensible custom of sleeping off those delights in my best easy chair—one bought on the hire system, not the Government issue, where sleep under any circumstances is completely out of the question—owing, as I say, to this unpleasant propensity, I approached my commanding officer. N.C.O.'s were annoyed—they entreated, they implored, and the issue was in doubt, till a providential attack of influenza laid my C.O. low for the time, and the senior sub-

altern—myself—reigned in his stead. Then the sergeant-major laughed, and resigned himself to the inevitable. Driver Robert Brown became my servant, and the desecrator of my padded arm-chair retired—after a short period of durance vile—to seek repose on stable buckets.

During the forthcoming six months I am bound to admit I suffered—dreadfully. You do not make a servant in a day; but he tried his level best. We had shirt parades, in which I instructed him in the art of studding shirts, with little hints thrown in as to the advisability of wreaking his will on the shirt for dinner before he cleaned my parade boots for the following morning—not after. We delved into the intricacies of washing lists, and he waxed indignant over the prices charged. They seemed to me quite ordinary, but Brown would have none of it. I did not often study them—bills were never one of my hobbies; but one day it suddenly struck me the month's bill was smaller than usual. That was the awful occasion when changing quickly for cricket. I thought something was wrong with the shirt; it seemed rather stiffer in front than the average flannel—moreover, it had no buttons. Howls for Brown. Vituperation for lack of buttons.

“But, sir, that's an evening shirt you've got on. One I washed myself to save the washing bill.”
Tableau.

Then I prepared lists on pieces of paper as to the exact things I required packed in my suit-case when

I departed for week-ends. There was the hunting week-end, and the ball-dance week-end, and the week-end when I stayed 'neath the parental roof, and—er—other week-ends too numerous to mention. I would grunt Dance, or Home, or Brighton at him when he brought me my tea on Friday morning, and then during the morning he would, with the aid of the correct list, pack the necessary. There were occasional lapses. Once I remember—it was lunch-time on Friday, and we were being inspected. The mess was full of brass hats, and my train was 2.45. I had howled Dance at Brown as I passed my room before lunch, and was hoping for the best, when the mess waiter told me my servant wanted me for a moment. I went outside.

“Please, sir, them thin ones of yours is full of holes and the other three are at the wash.” His voice like himself was good and big. “Shall I run down and buy a pair and meet you at the station?”

All the general said when I returned was, “Did he mean socks?”

Then there was a dreadful occasion when he sent me away one week-end with one of his dickies in my bag—he had been promoted to mufti—instead of a dress shirt; and another even more awful when he sent me to an austere household—prayers at eight, etc.—from the owner of which I had hopes, with my boots wrapped in a paper of orange hue which had better be nameless. I could continue indefinitely—the mistakes that lad made would have built a

church; but withal I never wish for a better servant—a truer-hearted friend. And all this happened in the long dim ages way back before we started—he and I—with thousands of others for the land across the water; where for a space he remained my servant, until in the fullness of time he passed down that Long Valley from which there is no return. Many have passed down it these last months—many will pass down it before Finis is written on this World War; but none deserve a gentler crossing over the Great Divide than Robert Brown, Driver, R.E., and some-time batman.

Now should there be any who, having read as far as this, hopefully continue in the belief that they are getting near the motto—in the shape of some wonderful deed of heroism and daring—they will, I am afraid, be disappointed. I have no startling pegs on which to hang the tale of his life. Like thousands of others, he never did anything very wonderful—he never did anything at all wonderful. He was just one of the big army of Browns out here of whom no one has ever heard. One of that big army who have done their bit unrewarded, unknown—because it was the thing to do; a feeling unknown to some of those at home—I allude to the genus Maidenhead Maggot still seen in large quantities—er—resting. And yet for each of those Browns—their death recorded so tersely in the paper—some heart-broken woman has sobbed through the long night, watching

the paling dawn with tear-stained eyes, aching for the sound of footsteps for ever still, conjuring up again the last time she saw her man, now lying in a nameless grave. Would the Maggot get as much? I wonder.

As I have said, I'm afraid I haven't got anything very wonderful to describe. You can't make a deathless epic out of a man being sick—dreadfully sick beside the road—and an hour afterwards getting your food for you. It doesn't sound very romantic, I admit, and yet—— It was in the morning, I remember, about three o'clock, that we first smelt it, and we were lying about half a mile behind the line. That first sweet smell of chlorine turning gradually into the gasping, throat-racking fumes. Respirators weren't regarded with the same importance then as they are now, but we all had them. Of course I'd lost mine. Since early childhood I have invariably lost everything. Brown found it, and I put it on—and then he disappeared. Some two hours later, when the shelling had abated a little, and the gas had long since passed, I found him again. He was white and sweating, and the gas was in him—not badly, you understand, not badly—but the gas was in him. For three or four hours he was sick, very sick—and his head was bursting. I know what he felt like.

And I said to the major, "I'm sorry it's Brown, but it'll teach him a lesson not to lose his respirator again," for that is the way with Thomas Atkins—

he is apt to lose most things that are not attached to him by chains.

It doesn't sound at all romantic all this, does it?—and yet, well, I found *my* respirator in the pocket of another coat. And as Brown came in with some food—he'd recovered about an hour—I handed him back *his* respirator, and I asked him why he'd done it.

“Well, I though as 'ow you might 'ave to be giving orders like, and would want it more than me.” He spoke quite naturally.

I didn't thank him—I couldn't have spoken to save my life—but the lad knew what I thought. There are some things for which thanks are an insult.

There was another thing which comes to me too, as I write—nothing very wonderful again, and yet— In the course of our wanderings we were engaged upon a job of work that caused us to make nightly a pilgrimage through Wipers. At the time Wipers was not healthy. That stage of the war of attrition—I understand that many of the great thinkers call it a war of attrition, though personally I wish they could be here when the Hun is attriting, or whatever the verb is—that stage, then, known as the second battle of Ypres was in progress. And, though all of that modern Pompeii was unhealthy at the time, there were certain marked places particularly so. One such was the Devil's Corner. There, nightly, a large number of things—men and horses—were killed; and the road was littered with—well, fragments.

Now it chanced one night that I had taken Brown with me to a point inside the salient, and at midnight I had sent him away—back to the field the other side of Ypres, where for the time we were lying. Two or three hours after I followed him, and my way led me past the Devil's Corner. All was quite quiet—the night's hate there was over, at any rate for the moment. One house was burning fiercely just at the corner, and the only sounds that broke the silence were the crackling of the flames and the occasional clatter of a limbered wagon travelling fast down a neighbouring road. And then suddenly I heard another sound—clear above my own footsteps. It was the voice of a man singing—at least, when I say singing—it was a noise of sorts. Also there was no mistaking the owner of the voice. Too often had I heard that same voice apostrophising “a beautiful picture, in a beautiful golden fraime.” I stopped surprised—for what in the name of fortune Brown was doing in such an unsavoury spot was beyond me! In fact, I felt distinctly angry. The practice of remaining in needlessly dangerous places is not one to be encouraged. I traced that noise; it came from behind an overturned limber, with two defunct horses lying in the ditch. I crossed the road and peered over.

Sitting in the ditch was Robert Brown, and on his knees rested the head of the limber driver. In the breaking dawn you could see that the end was very near—the driver had driven for the last time.

From the limp sag of his back I thought it was broken, and a bit of shell had removed—well, no matter, but one could hear the beating of the wings. Brown didn't see me, but occasionally, gentle as a woman, he bent over him and wiped the death sweat from his forehead; while all the time, under his breath, mechanically, he hummed his dirge. Then the man, lying half under the limber, stirred feebly.

"What is it, mate?" said Brown, leaning forward.

"Take the letters out of my pocket, matey," he muttered. "Them blokes at the War Office takes so long—and send 'em to—to——" The lips framed the words feebly, but no sound came.

"Who to, pal?" whispered Brown; but even as he spoke the poor maimed form quivered and lay still. And as I watched Brown lay his head gently down, and close his eyes, the road, the houses seemed to grow a trifle misty. When I next looked up I saw him stumping away down the road, and, as he rounded the corner, a dreadful noise stating that, with regard to a lady named Thora, "he had loved 'er in life too little, 'e 'ad loved 'er in death too well," came floating back in the still air.

Yet methinks no great man's soul, speeded on its way by organ and anthem, ever had a nobler farewell than that limber driver, if the spirit of the singer has anything to do with it.

But, as I said before, I could continue indefinitely. Was there not the terrible occasion when I found

him standing guard over a perfectly harmless Belgian interpreter, with a pick in his hand and the light of battle in his eye, under the impression that he had caught a German spy? The wretched man had lain on the ground for three hours—every movement being greeted with a growl of warning from Brown and a playful flourish of his pick. Also the awful moment when in an excess of zeal he built the Major a canvas chair, which collapsed immediately he sat in it, thereby condemning my irate commanding officer to walk in a bent-up position with the framework attached to his person, till his howls of rage produced deliverance. But time is short, and the pegs are small. He was just one of the Robert Browns, that's all; and the last peg in the lad's life is perhaps the smallest of all.

It was wet two or three days ago, very wet; and I, as usual, had gone out without a mackintosh. We were away back west of Ypres, in a region generally considered safe. It is safe as a matter of fact by comparison, but occasionally the Hun treats us to an obus or two—lest we forget his existence. I got back very wet, very angry, and very bored, and howled for Brown. There was no answer, save only from the doctor's orderly, and he it was who told me. Brown had started out when the rain came on, six or seven hours before, with my mackintosh, and, not returning, they had gone to look for him.

In a ditch they found him with the water dyed crimson, a few minutes before he died. It was just

a stray shell that found its mark on the lad. I can see him in my mind stumping along the road, humming his song—and then, without warning, the sudden screech close on top of him, the pitiful, sagging knees, the glazing film of death, with none to aid him through as he had helped that other, for the road was little used.

Thank God! they found him before the end, but he only made one remark. "I couldn't get no farther, Dick," he muttered, "but the mack ain't stained."

I went up to see him in the brewery where they'd carried him, and I looked on his honest, ugly face for the last time. "The mack ain't stained." No, lad, it isn't. May I, when I come to the last fence, be able to say the same.

Though he spoke it literally, there is, methinks, a man's religion in those last words of Robert Brown, Driver, R.E., and sometime batman.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE COWARD

JAMES DAWLISH'S soul was sick within him. His tongue was cleaving to the roof of his mouth, parched and dry; his eyes gazed dully out of his white face at the pack of the man in front of him, who, like himself and fifty others, crouched huddled up in the ditch beside the road. Away in front stretched the pavé road, gleaming white in the dim light of dusk, the road that ran straight, as only French roads can, until, topping the rise three-quarters of a mile ahead, it merged into the darkness of the two lines of trees that guarded it. And twenty yards beyond that rise lay the German lines.

Then suddenly it came again. Out of the silent evening air the sudden salvo of six sharp hisses and six deafening cracks, the angry zipping of high explosive shrapnel through the trees over his head, the little eddies of dust in the road, the little thuds in the banks of the ditch where he crouched. Put baldly—in the language of the army—the Germans were searching the road with whizz-bangs, and had been doing so for twenty minutes. And the soul of James Dawlish was sick within him.

All around him men were muttering, laughing, cursing, each after his kind. In front an officer, very young, very new, was speaking to his sergeant-major. What he said is immaterial—which is perhaps as well, as he did nothing but repeat himself. The sergeant-major was a man of understanding, grown as used to shells as man may grow. For that matter so had the others—they were not a new regiment. James Dawlish was not new either. It was not his baptism of fire—he'd been shelled many times before; but for all that he was afraid—terribly, horribly afraid.

The psychology of fear is a strange thing. It is perhaps paradoxical, but I venture to think that without fear there can be no bravery—bravery, that is, in the true sense of the word. There are, I believe, some men who are without fear—literally and absolutely fearless. Such a condition of mind may be induced by sincere fatalism, but I rather think in the majority of cases it is due to a peculiar and fortunate twist of the brain. Inasmuch as one man will without thought dive forty feet into the sea and enjoy it, so will another, whose limbs would tremble at such a thought, boldly enter a cage of lions. Temperament, temperament only, at the bottom of it. And so it may well be that, were the wonderful, soul-stirring heroism of some V.C. to be weighed in the balance of mind and soul rather than in the balance of deed, he would be found less worthy to hold that coveted ribbon than a man whose sole contribution to fame was that he didn't run away.

Not so James Dawlish. With him fear seemed to be cumulative. Each time he came under fire, his terror of it increased. With most of us, who lay no claim to be without fear, sooner or later a merciful callousness settles down. Not that, if we think about it, our dislike of the *genus obus* is any less—far from it. But as time goes on, and a man does not get hit, though one day the dug-out he had just left was flattened by a crump, and another the man he was talking to was killed before his eyes; though he may have had a hundred narrow escapes, yet in time it becomes to a greater or less extent his natural element—a part and parcel of his life—a thing of routine as much as breakfast, more so, in some cases. But that man is no braver now than he was: more fearless, perhaps, but no braver. It is, then, with most of us, the factor of custom that pulls us through the mill, and preserves our reason.

But to James Dawlish that factor was denied. Fate had decreed that the brain of James Dawlish should be so fashioned that no immunity from death in the past should detract one iota from the hideous terror of death in the present. Every tour of duty in the trenches he died a thousand deaths. He saw himself left dying between the lines, stabbed in a sudden German rush, the recipient of the attentions of a Black Maria. He pictured to himself countless forms of death, each one more unpleasant than the last. Only the routine, the discipline of the army had held him up to date, that and the complete lack of

opportunity to run away. It is easier said than done to run away from the front-line trenches, especially when things are quiet.

Which all boils down to the one essential fact that James Dawlish was a coward in the true sense of the word. Hundreds of men have lost their nerve temporarily, hundreds of men, huddled in a scratch in the ground, with their senses deadened and crushed by an inferno of bursting shells, have done things which the thoughtless dub cowardly. Men suddenly exposed to gas with no means of protection, men waking to find the trench full of liquid fire, these and countless other cases no man may judge unless he has stood beside them in similar circumstances and not been found wanting. But James Dawlish was not one of these. To him every moment of his life was a living death, a torture worse than hell. If one looks back to the cause of things, it was, I suppose, his misfortune and not his fault. He had been made so. Fear was a part of him, and pity rather than contempt is perhaps the fairest feeling to entertain for him. He could no more help his state of permanent terror, than a cat can help its dislike of water.

"Get up." The word came down the line, the shelling seemed to have stopped. The men in front of him were moving off up the road, but still he remained. A man tripped over him and cursed, but James Dawlish sat fumbling with his putties. No scheme was in his head; he had no intention of not

going up to the front line; but clear out of the jumble of thoughts in his brain was his feverish desire to postpone if only for five minutes his nearer acquaintance with those great green flares that lobbed into the sky so near him. He could almost hear the faint hiss as they fell burning to the ground. God! how he hated it! Then they started shelling a cross-road a hundred yards behind him, and he cowered still closer in the ditch, almost whimpering—for it had suddenly struck him that he was alone. His platoon had gone on and left him: he had not even got the faint comfort of another man beside him. He was alone, utterly alone on a shell-swept road with an occasional spare bullet pinging down it, and the trees throwing fantastic shadows around him.

Then suddenly above his head he heard voices, and the soft thrumming of a motor.

"They'll stop hating in a moment and then we'll rush it," said a voice.

James Dawlish looked up, and in that moment the idea was born in his bemused brain. Safety—away from those cursed shells—away from those hissing green flares! What matter the right or wrong—what matter the penalties? Nothing entered into his calculations, saving only the thought of escape. And so with infinite caution he got out of the ditch and approached the driver of the ambulance as if he had been coming down the road.

"Give us a lift, mate, will you?" he asked casually.

"Right ho! hop in. They've stopped shelling." The

ambulance was off—the driver unsuspecting. Many isolated men walk about behind the trenches at night, and anyway, it was none of his business.

Thus it came about that No. 1234 Private James Dawlish, of the second battalion of the Loamshires, when on active service, deserted His Majesty's Forces.

Now Thomas Atkins alone in a strange country, despite all rumours to the contrary, is a somewhat helpless individual. He will generally contrive to feed himself, and he has an infallible instinct for spotting those estaminets that contain the unpleasing liquid which passes as beer in Flanders. But when it comes to getting from one place to another, he gives up the unequal contest, and throws himself on the mercy of the nearest officer. And this was precisely what James Dawlish could not do. In the first place, he didn't know where he did want to go; he didn't much care so long as he kept out of the trenches; and in the second place, he was quite an old enough soldier to realise what he had done and, what was far more to the point, to realise the penalty. "Death or such less punishment as is in this Act mentioned."

Detection, he knew, would not come from the regiment. Too many men are reported missing for his absence to evoke any awkward questions. It was the people behind he had to fear, military police, assistant provost-marshals, and such-like abominations to the evil-doer. If only he could lie hid for a time, and finally borrow some one else's clothes and

disappear—that was his half-formed play. Hazy and nebulous, true—but anything, anything on God's earth rather than go back.

It was while he was turning it over in his mind, with no clear idea of where he was going, that, rounding a bend in the road, he saw a few miles off the monastery that is set on a hill, and which forms one of the few noticeable landmarks in Flanders. The monastery where the cavalry had a skirmish in October last, and the monks in their brown cowls and cassocks buried the result. There were English troopers, and German Uhlans, and also there was a German Prince. And this monastery, set on the Mont des Cats, came back to James Dawlish as an old friend. Had he not billeted in the village at the foot of it with the unpronounceable name when he first came to the front?

No need now to ask his way—he would go back to the village—where there was a girl he knew of, and she would help him. And so with a comparatively light heart he started, and in the course of a few hours he found himself at the farm which had been his first resting-place in France.

Now, it is quite possible that, were it not for the extraordinary paucity of girls whom one may look at without smoked glasses in this delectable country, James Dawlish might have staved off the inevitable for quite a time. When he left the ambulance, he had carefully buried in a pond his rifle and equipment, and anyone meeting him strolling down the

road would have taken him to be merely a man from a unit resting. To make things more sure, he had removed his cap badge, and the titles on his shoulder straps. There was nothing whatever to show what he belonged to; he was merely a disreputable atom of the big machine in much-damaged khaki. But, as I have said, there was a girl in the case, and moreover, she was a girl who had been very kind to James Dawlish earlier in the proceedings. She really had been quite fond of him, but when he went away and the place knew him no more, being a girl of common sense she transferred her attentions to his successor. As a matter of fact, there had been several successors, as regiments came and went, the intervals being filled with the semi-permanent sheet-anchor who stood for several hours each day at the cross-roads by the church in the village with the unpronounceable name. And this sheet-anchor, who watched men come and watched men go, was a corporal in the Military Police.

It was during one of his innings with the fair maiden that James Dawlish tactlessly arrived on the scene; and when the Corporal made his appearance in the evening, having successfully carried out his arduous duties regulating the traffic during the afternoon; he found the object of his affections planted firmly in the arms of an extremely untidy and travel-stained private. It is perhaps unnecessary to state that, annoyed as the Corporal was at this untoward intrusion on his preserves, his feelings were har-

monious compared to those of Private Dawlish. To run full tilt into a Red Cap—as Tommy calls them—was the last thing he had intended doing; and a glance at the Corporal's face told him that the Corporal was out for blood.

"Who the 'ell are you, and what's your regiment?" he remarked tersely, looking at his badgeless cap.

And James Dawlish knew the game was up. He didn't even know what regiments were in the neighbourhood; if he had he might have lied and tried a bluff. So he said who he was, and named his regiment.

"The Loamshires?" said the Corporal. "Second battalion? But they're in the trenches, for my brother's in that there battalion." The Military Policeman looked at him mercilessly. "What are you doing 'ere, my lad?"

And this time James Dawlish was silent: there was nothing to say. To an officer he'd have lied, uselessly, perhaps, but lied on principle: to a corporal he knew the futility. Two minutes later the door closed behind them, and they passed down the street.

Thus it came about that No. 1234, Private James Dawlish, of the second battalion of the Loamshires, was apprehended by the Military Police, and placed in the guard-room of the village with the unpronounceable name, to await the investigation of his case by the A.P.M. or assistant provost-marshal of the district.

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And now the inevitable end must be written. There is not much to tell; the whole thing was plain. The A.P.M. investigated the case, and it stood revealed in its hideous bareness. There was not a single redeeming feature. It was no case of a man's nerve temporarily breaking under some fearful strain: where now, in the wisdom of those in high places, a man may work off his slur, by returning and trying again. It was just a simple case of cowardice and desertion in the presence of the enemy, and for it there was no excuse. That James Dawlish was made that way may have been his misfortune, but if that were taken as an excuse a good many men might find themselves sitting quietly in villages with unpronounceable names, while their pals lost their lives further east.

So in due course James Dawlish stood before a court-martial. The evidence was heard, and then the accused was marched out, ignorant of his fate.

"The Court is closed to consider its finding." Thus spoke the President, a Major in the infantry. And when the door had closed, he turned to the junior member—a subaltern of gunners—and his face was grave. It is the law of courts-martial that the junior member gives his idea of the adequate sentence first, in order that he may not be influenced by what his seniors have said.

"What is your opinion?" asked the Major.

The subaltern drummed on the table with his fingers, and stared in front of him. Death, or such less

penalty. The words seemed stamped on the wall. For a space he was silent; then he swallowed twice and spoke.

The Major glanced at the Captain, and the Captain, who was gazing fixedly out of the window, turned slowly round, and nodded. "I agree," he remarked incisively.

The Major looked at the papers in front of him, and mechanically produced his cigarette case. Then he wrote, and his hand shook a little.

And though the Major and the Captain and the subaltern had one and all looked on death many times unmoved, yet that night they were strangely silent.

To those who insist on the hundred and first chapter I can but quote the following bald announcement that appeared in a document of surpassing dullness known as General Routine Orders. It had a number which I forget, and it was sandwiched between an interesting statement about exchanging French money into English, and a still more entrancing one on the subject of the Regimental Debts Act. Moreover, it was labelled Courts-Martial, and ran as follows:

No. 1234, Private James Dawlish, 2nd Battalion, The Loamshires, was tried by a Field General Courts-Martial on the following charge:

"When on active service deserting His Majesty's Service."

The sentence of the Court was "To suffer death by being shot."

The sentence was duly carried out at 4 a. m. on August 3rd.

And the only thing which gives a man to think is that about six hours after they laid that poor dishonoured clay in the ground, the manager of a large emporium at home was pleased to promote one of his shopwalkers from the glove department to a sphere of activity which concerned itself principally with stockings. I don't know why stockings were more highly paid than gloves in that emporium, but no matter.

The point of the thing is the shopwalker. His name is Dawlish—Augustus Dawlish. He used to look down on his brother James. Soldiering is not a genteel occupation compared to selling stockings. I suppose he'll do so still more if he ever learns the truth.

CHAPTER XIX

WILL YOU TAKE OVER HIS HORSE, SIR?

IN the sky overhead the sun struggled through the drifting clouds, throwing a watery gleam on the sea of mud which called itself the picket line. Just for a moment it seemed as if it would triumph, and, as I looked up, the old bay horse with the batman standing at his head was bathed in sunshine. Behind him the troop horses steadily munching hay; the men in little scattered groups squatting round camp fires watching their dinners cook. Just the same as it was yesterday, just the same as it was the day before, but—"Will you take over his horse, sir?"

In the distance a black speck seemed to be hanging in the air. All round it little sharp flashes of fire and fleecy puffs of smoke showed that the Germans had also seen that speck and hoped it was within range. There was one complete set of six smoke balls, so close together that one could almost cover them with a soup plate. Another set had only five. Ah! there was the sixth, a little wide. There had been three perfect groups of six when he and I had been looking at the same thing a few mornings be-

fore. Listlessly I watched the black speck. Gradually it grew larger and larger until the big biplane passed overhead. And underneath the Union Jack—painted on the plane. Just the same, thank Heaven, just the same. The flag untouched, each unit which represents that flag carrying on the inexorable work. There is no cessation; there are others; it is war, but—“Will you take over his horse?”

The old bay horse! I wonder if you, too, remember that day at Tattersall's. Do you remember the hand running over your legs and stopping at that big splint on your off fore? Can you hear again that voice you've got to know so well? “Look at those hocks, man; look at that shoulder; that splint may just bring him down to my price.” And do you remember the hunts? Do you remember that point-to-point when you both came such a crumpler at that big stake and binder? Perhaps you remember, old horse, perhaps you do; for who shall say just where an animal's knowledge begins and ends? There's no good your looking round like that. You haven't seen him this morning, have you?—and you know something's wrong, but you don't know what. How should you? You don't understand, and I do, Heaven knows—which is worse. In time perhaps the sugar will taste just as good out of my hand as far as you're concerned. I hope it will, because—well, you heard the question, too—“Will you take over his horse?”

Yes, I must take you over until someone else can take you from me, if you come through this show alive. You don't know much about that someone, do you, old chap? Do you remember that day when you made such a fool of yourself because a side saddle had been put on you for the first time, and your master with a sack round his waist was sitting on your back all askew, as you thought. And then about a week after, when you were quite accustomed to it, someone else got upon you who was so light that you scarcely felt any weight at all. And when you lifted your heels a bit, just for fun, because you hardly knew there was anyone there at all, do you remember how he rubbed your muzzle and talked to you until you became quiet? But there are so many things that you can't know, aren't there, old horse? You weren't in my room when he came round to it that night to tell me before anyone else of his wonderful luck. You couldn't know that the little light load you carried so often was the most precious thing in the whole world to the man who never missed coming round to your box after dinner on a hunting day, to make sure you were rugged up and bedded down for the night all right. That's where I get the pull of you, old man. You see, I was going to be his best man when he could afford to get married. He insisted on that when he told me first. But—things have happened since that night, and I'm going to take you over, because I want to give you back to her. I don't expect you'll carry her hunting again; women aren't

made that way—at least not this one. Though he'd like it, I know.

But then, he won't be able to tell her. That's the rub. I know it was only yesterday afternoon you heard him say that it was a grand day for a hunt. I know it was only last night that you were saddled up suddenly with all the other troop horses and trotted for two hours along muddy roads in the darkness. Then he dismounted—didn't he?—and went on on foot with his men, while you and his other horse stopped behind. And you couldn't understand why a few hours later, when the other men mounted, no one got on your back, and you were led back here. Just a casual German sniper, sitting in a tree, taking pot shots into the darkness. Just a small round hole right in the centre of his forehead and the back of his head—but we won't think of that. That's what happened, old man. Nothing very glorious, nothing at all heroic. It's so ordinary, isn't it? It has already happened hundreds of times. It's going to happen hundreds more. Everything is going on just the same. It hasn't made any difference. The guns are in action just as they were yesterday, and there's that Maxim going again. But you've lost your master, old horse; and I've lost a friend: and the girl?— Not a bad bag, for half an ounce of lead!

They've left him up there, with a cross over his

shallow grave, and his name scrawled on it with an indelible pencil. One can't get up there in the daylight—it's not safe. I'd like to have gone to-night to see if it was all right: but there's a job of work to be done elsewhere. So I'll have to lie to her. I'm writing her this afternoon. I can't let her open the paper one morning, and suddenly see his name standing out in letters of fire from all the others. Just a pawn in the game—another officer killed—a bare, hard fact, brutal, uncompromising. No more letters to look forward to: no more socks and smokes to send out. True, the socks never fitted, but she didn't know. No: I can't let her find it out that way. I must write: though what on earth can I say to her? I never could write a letter like that. If you're going to have your head smashed with a sledgehammer, one can't do much to deaden the blow. But I'll tell her I've seen his grave, and that it's all right. Just a pawn in the game. Only he was her king.

“Will you take over his horse, sir? Your chestnut is very lame in front.”

Teddy, old man, I've hunted with you: I've shot with you: I've played cricket with you: I've made love with you. You were one of Nature's sportsmen: one of the salt of the earth. May the earth lie lightly on you, old pal. There's a motor-cyclist coming with orders now: the same fellow with spectacles who has been to us for the last fortnight. There's a Taube overhead, and the infantry are loosing off at it. It's

out of range, just the same as usual. Everything is just the same, Teddy, except that someone's heart has got to be broken, and that I—well, I've taken over your horse.

CHAPTER XX

THE AFTERMATH

AWAY in front, gleaming white through the gathering dusk on the side of a hill, lies the front line. Just beyond it, there is another: the Germans. Down in the valley behind that white line a town, from which with monotonous regularity rise great columns of black smoke—German heavies bursting again and again on the crumbling red houses. And from the village there rises a great iron construction with two girdered towers, a landmark for miles. Periodically German crumps sail overhead with a droning noise, woolly bears burst on one's flank, and then a salvo coming unpleasantly near makes one remember that the skyline is not recommended by the best people as a place to stand on, and, getting into the trench, you retire again to the dug-out, to wait for the night to cloak your doings.

In the line of trench are men—men not there to fight, not even in support. They are there to clear up the battlefield; for only a few days ago the trench in which you are sitting was the German front line. The bed on which you lie has supported a stout Teuton for probably ten long months or more; and now

where is he? My predecessor was addicted to the use of a powerful scent of doubtful quality, which still hangs faintly in the air. He also believed in comfort. There are easy chairs, and cupboards, and tables, and, as I say, a bed. Also there are mice, scores of them, who have a great affection for using one's face as a race course during one's periods of rest.

But my predecessor was absolutely out of it with another fellow along the trench. His dug-out was a veritable palace, boasting of wall-papers and a carpet, with a decorated dado round the part where dados live, and a pretty design in fruits and birds painted on the ceiling. Bookshelves filled with the latest thing in German wit, and a very nice stove with flue attached. I was beaten by a short head trying to get there, which was, perhaps, as well. Mine confined itself to mice. . . .

Gradually the night falls, and with it starts the grim task. It was, as I have said, the German line—now it is ours; the change is not brought about without a price. Turn around, away from that line now almost invisible in front, and look behind. There, over a mass of broken pickets and twisted wire, gleams another white line—our original front trenches. Between you and it lies the no man's land of ten months—and there on that strip of land is part of the price. It lies elsewhere as well, but a patch of fifty yards will serve. There was one, I remember, where the German line had swung out at right angles

—a switch—going nearer to ours. In this bit of the line the wire had run perpendicular to the rest of their trench for a few score yards. And in the re-entrant a machine gun had been placed, so that it fired along the wire. The steel casing we found still standing, though the ground around was torn to pieces. That machine gun paid for its construction. . . .

There was one group of four outside, a subaltern and three men. They were lying on the ground, in one close-packed jumble, and the subaltern had his arm around a man's neck. Just in the torn up wire they lay—the price at the moment of victory. Another five seconds and they would have been in that line; but it was left to some one else to stop that machine gun firing. And so, beside that motionless, distorted group a hole is dug, and soon no trace remains. One phase of clearing the battlefield; there are many such holes to be made. A few yards away—this time on the parapet of the trench—a Scotchman and a German are lying together. The Scotchman's bayonet is through the German—his hands still hold the rifle—and as he stabbed him he himself had been shot from behind. A strange tableau: natural enough, yet weirdly grim to the imagination when seen by the dim light two or three days after it took place.

One could elaborate indefinitely. Each of those quiet, twisted figures means some one's tragedy: each of them goes to form the price which must be paid.

And at no time, I think, does the brutal realism of war strike home more vividly than when in cold blood one sees before one's eyes the results of what took place in hot blood a few days before. Just a line in the paper—a name—no more. That is the public result of the price, and at one time it seemed to me hard on those behind. Unavoidable of course, but hard. No details—nothing—just a statement. I have changed my mind: there are worse things than ignorance. . . .

Then from the trenches themselves, from the dug-outs, from behind are pulled out the Huns. Caught in their deep dug-outs, with the small, slanting shaft going down to great chambers hewed out of the chalk underneath—and some of the shafts are ten to twelve yards long—unable to get out during the bombardment, they were killed by the score. A few bombs flung down the shaft and—*voilà tout*. And so they are hauled out one at a time. More holes to be dug—more shell holes to be utilised. Apropos of those Hun dug-outs, a little incident in one of them revealed yet another side of Tommy's character. Truly is he a man of many parts. A few cheery sportsmen having worked manfully and well, and having earned their rest, found the dug-out they had marked as their own was occupied. It had for the time been missed in the search for Germans; that was why it was occupied. Nothing daunted, however, they piled the occupants on one side, while they peacefully went to sleep on the other. There's no doubt getting a dead

German up those shafts is weary work, and they were tired. But I'd sooner have slept in the trench myself. However, that is by the way.

And so we go on, wandering in perfect safety over the ground that a few days before meant certain death. A mass of rifles, kit, bandoliers, accoutrements litters the ground, save where it has already been collected and sorted into heaps. Unexploded bombs lie everywhere, clips of ammunition, bayonets. All has to be collected and sent back—another phase of clearing the battlefield.

Then there is the road where some transport was caught topping the rise. There the holes have to be bigger, for the horses have to be buried even as the men. It is only rarely the process is already done. One horse there was, in a trench on his back, fifty yards from the road, stone dead. How he got there, Heaven knows. He wasn't much trouble.

Then there was another mound from which protruded an arm, in German uniform, with its fingers pointing. And the hand was black.

A morbid sight, a sight one will never forget. Vividest of all in my mind remains the impression of a German skeleton, near the edge of our own trench. Dead for nearly a year perhaps, shot in some night attack, trying to cut the wire. A skeleton hand from which the wire-cutters had long since fallen, crumbled on a strand, a skull grinned at the sky, a uniform mouldered.